

**THE DOMESTIC UNCANNY:
CO-HABITING WITH GHOSTS**

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DECLARATION

I confirm that the work here presented is my own. Information derived from other sources is indicated in the thesis.

Signed:

ABSTRACT

The 'haunted home' has enjoyed a long-standing position as a motif within society, crossing a span of narratives, from anecdotal local stories shared informally between family and friendship networks, to the established gothic traditions of literature and film. This project uniquely examines the ways in which people who believe their homes to be haunted negotiate the experience of co-habiting with ghosts. It is a qualitative study which has applied a mix of creative methodologies to a number of in-depth case studies in England and Wales. Geographers and researchers in related disciplines have recently expressed interest in the idea of ghosts or haunting, but have tended to focus upon public metropolitan spaces, and to employ the ghost as a metaphor or social figure. In contrast, this project contributes to a growing literature on the material and immaterial geographies of the home, the intangible and affective aspects of everyday life within the particular context of the domestic interior. The project explores the insights uncanny events experienced within this space reveal about people's embodied, emotional, spatial and temporal relationships with 'home' as both physical place and as a set of ideals. It studies the way in which people negotiate experiences which appear to lack rational or natural explanation, and the interpretative narratives employed to explain them. It suggests ways in which different forms of belief influence interpretations of uncanny events. It also suggests ways in which inhabitants of haunted homes negotiate the co-habitation with ghosts through a number of strategies which reinforce their own subjectivity in the face of potential encroachment into their private space.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	9
 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	 10
WIDER CONTEXTS	12
Ghosts in Social, Cultural and Historical Context	13
Investigating Ghosts	20
Famous Hauntings	22
HOME	25
Defining Home	25
Contesting Ideals	26
Gender	27
The Place of Home	29
SELF AND HOME	33
Situating Subjectivity	34
Self and Other	39
Bodies and Sensations	41
THE UNCANNY HOME	43
The Im/material Geographies of Home	48
The Material Uncanny	50
Liminality	51
MEMORY	53
The Social Life of Ghost Stories	56
APPROACHING THE GHOST	59
The Ghost as Metaphor or Social Figure	59
Approaching the Ghost Differently	61
Contesting Knowledge, Embracing Uncertainty	66
Experiencing Otherwise, Knowing Differently?	70

CHAPTER FOUR: STRATEGIES OF CO-HABITATION	163
PART A: EMBODYING, DOMESTICATING THE GHOSTS	163
The Ghost as Personhood	163
<i>The ghosts are not orthodox</i>	166
<i>The ghosts don't feel</i>	167
Naming and Humour	168
Gender and Co-habitation	172
<i>Conventional gender categories</i>	172
<i>Placing gender</i>	173
<i>Benign female/malevolent male</i>	177
PART B: STRATEGIES OF DISTANCE AND COMMUNICATION	181
Distance	181
<i>Geography</i>	181
<i>Playing down impact</i>	184
<i>Not seeing</i>	186
<i>Ghosts don't/can't communicate</i>	191
<i>Not talking</i>	194
Communication	197
<i>Connecting</i>	197
<i>Accepting</i>	199
<i>Engaging</i>	201
The Sharing of Ghost Narratives	203
Talking with the Ghosts	204
<i>Ghosts speak to inhabitants</i>	205
<i>Inhabitants speak to ghosts</i>	208
PART C: NEGOTIATING SELF-SPACE	213
P (CS2): Giving Away Power	213
Ch (CS2): Tussles with a Ghost	216
T (CS6): 'Accommodating' Ghosts and Landladies	219
B (CS10): Performing his Place	223
CONCLUSION	227

CHAPTER FIVE: KNOWLEDGE, BELIEF AND EVIDENCE	235
PART A: KNOWLEDGE, BELIEF AND UNCERTAINTY	235
Different Types of 'Knowledge'	236
<i>Just knowing</i>	236
<i>Personal 'meanings'</i>	238
Contested Beliefs	238
<i>Gender and self-doubt</i>	249
Embracing Uncertainty	252
PART B: BELIEF, EVIDENCE AND EXPERIENCE	260
Different Beliefs, Different Responses	260
<i>Cultural belief</i>	261
<i>Folklore belief</i>	265
<i>Religious belief</i>	271
Evidence, Proof, and Experience	274
<i>Natural explanation first</i>	274
<i>Material evidence</i>	278
<i>Experiences challenge beliefs</i>	281
<i>Seeing is believing</i>	284
<i>Corroborating experience</i>	287
<i>Testing the ghosts</i>	293
CONCLUSION	297

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS	301
CROSS-CUTTING THEMES	302
Familiarity	302
Uncertainty	303
The Hierarchy of the Senses	304
Imagination and Reality	305
Cultural Conventions	306
Continuities	307
The Liminal Home/Self	308
POSITIONINGS	312
Home	312
Approaching the Ghost	313
New Humanism	314
BIBLIOGRAPHY	316
CASE STUDY KEY	348

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

How does it feel to live in a 'haunted home'? How do people negotiate the so-called banality of their everyday worlds with the experience of uncanny, anomalous or strange events within the domestic interior? What does it reveal of the intersection of the material and immaterial within the home? Might it suggest ways in which people experience boundaries between public and private, interior and exterior? How do people interpret experiences which are uncertain and unpredictable? How are such experiences defined, explained, narrated? And what does this tell us about the relationship between different kinds of beliefs and forms of knowledge? Lastly, does such an experience challenge ideas of 'self', already embroiled in notions of 'home'?

This project sets out to put these, and related questions, to the test. It uses qualitative research methods to investigate thirteen case study scenarios in England and Wales, in 'haunted homes' ranging from inner-city apartments, suburban semis, to rural cottages. The key criterion is for participants to continue to live in their homes despite experiencing uncanny events, which they may or may not attribute to the supernatural. The relationship between the categories of 'uncanny' and 'ghost' are complex, and depend on individual contexts. The 'uncanny' is usually denoted as a general, broad description for the spaces as well as experiences of the haunted home. It can include a vague sense of anomalous phenomena, presence or atmosphere. Its uses and meanings are discussed later in this chapter. 'Ghosts' are perceived to be contained *within* the domestic uncanny, as well as contributing to its haunted aspect as a *source* of uncanny events, if not constituting the uncanny event itself; at times there is a focus on a particular, specific *figure* of a ghost.

My main aims are to explore:

- i. The relationship between the material and immaterial in the domestic interior, focusing on the home as an 'uncanny' and 'liminal' space, and teasing out the dynamic between the familiar and strange
- ii. The centrality of memory and history within the uncanny home: the way people configure their experiences in relation to their own, and their home's, past; and, related, the relationship between materialities and temporalities
- iii. The ways in which people manage to 'co-habit' with ghosts; how they deal with this self-other relationship within such close quarters, and in everyday life
- iv. An exploration of the influence of the wider cultural context, where what counts for beliefs, evidence, and knowledge, are contested
- v. Lastly, central to this research is the underlying question: how do we approach the ghost? How do we research anomalous phenomena and people's experiences and beliefs?

This introductory chapter offers an overview of relevant ideas, placing the above set of questions in context. I start with an exploration of the wider historical, social and cultural context explaining how popular assumptions about ghosts and hauntings have developed over time. I then move to review contemporary academic research on specific areas of relevance, starting with the home, and the relationship between self and home, including theorisations of bodies and the senses. The next section focuses on ideas of the uncanny, describing the material, immaterial and liminal aspects of 'home', and then moves to an exploration of memory and narrative. Different approaches to researching ghosts are then considered, followed by an exploration of contested knowledge, and the relationship between representation and 'experience'.

WIDER CONTEXTS

Descriptions of the supernatural, including ghosts and haunted houses, appear throughout recorded history. Although claims are deeply contested, such phenomena have maintained a continuous hold on the collective imagination. As such, then, to come to a project which places the ghost or uncanny event at its centre, it is necessary to acknowledge the importance of the wider historical and cultural context as it forms the backdrop to contemporary experience. Much recent academic work, as will be discussed later in this introductory chapter, is laden with uninterrogated popular assumptions about ghosts and haunted homes. During interviews with participants, it has been important to be aware of the ways in which these are refuted or reinforced. Likewise, I have needed to be aware of my own assumptions and to acknowledge the specific social and cultural terrain I share with interviewees. There is a widely-held belief, for example, that the haunted home is an unruly place of dramatic, poltergeist-like phenomena where no one ever stays long; this suggested a need to attend to the length of time people co-habit with ghosts, as well as the type of experiences they reported.

It is, of course, impossible to trace the origins of all ideas, the historical legacy of recurring motifs. But we can attend to some of the signposts pointing to particular continuities and discontinuities. Some aspects of tradition and experience appear to have been 'translated into new forms rather than disappeared in response to societal developments', according to historian Owen Davies (Davies, 2007: 249). For example, the 'legendary currency of phantom coaches and horsemen went into decline', whilst 'reports of ghostly cars... began to appear with increasing frequency' (ibid). On the other hand, the countryside, he claims, has been 'disenchanted', and ghosts 'are rarely seen these days groaning at crossroads, pacing bridges or lingering by pools' (ibid: 248). A continuing belief, historian Peter Maxwell-Stuart adds, is that the dead form a community which is an extension of the living, inhabiting a 'separate but connected' place which living people may glimpse from time to time, an other world similar to, but 'not *quite* like ours' (Maxwell-Stuart, 2006: 11).

A handful of books have recently been published which attempt to offer insights into the social and cultural history of ghosts, the ways in which beliefs and experiences of the supernatural have held up a mirror to society in different ways. Most academic interventions tend to assume the ghost is in itself a social or cultural phenomenon, an

outgrowth of the collective imagination, as will be discussed. But these particular studies do offer an overview of how the supernatural has impinged upon Western society, tracing assumptions which have circulated and stuck in various ways and at various times. They offer analysis of the way each generation of ghosts, from classical Greece to the current day, have been granted meanings depending on religious and social circumstances. Their findings are necessarily limited by a reliance on the written observations of a select group of generally elite male commentators. The relationship between local oral traditions and published accounts is, indeed, always difficult to unpack. This complicates the separation, designated by early twentieth century European folklorists, between '*Märchen*' (fiction) and '*Sagen*' (legends purportedly based on fact) (Finucane, 1996 :13. See also Dégh, 2001).

Ghosts in Social, Cultural and Historical Context

The ancient Greeks provide many familiar motifs. Ghosts 'learned to walk by night, to haunt houses, to frighten grown men, to demand – and get – sacrifices' (Finucane, 1996: 5). A common theme is for ghosts to haunt the site of their murder. Ghostly armies haunting battlefields are also common, and many ghosts were concerned that burial rites had not been properly performed. The latter was based on a belief that 'if the dead are not buried and honoured properly', they will be forbidden to enter the otherworld, 'thus being condemned to a perpetually restless existence betwixt and between the two worlds, intruding upon this one because they are not yet fully convinced that they are dead' (Maxwell-Stuart, 2006: 35). One account of Christian apparitions before AD 500 concerns a haunted house in Auxerre, France. A cleric, reading to a bishop in the house one night, witnessed a spectre and walls being pelted with stones. He cried to the bishop for help, who invoked the name of Christ and demanded to know why the ghost was there. The ghost spoke, explaining that after committing many crimes, he lay unburied and therefore could not rest. The ghost led the men to the site of his dead body, and it was buried (Finucane, 1996: 40-41).

Christian Europe inherited many pagan assumptions about the dead. Late-classical tradition 'attributed various activities to ghosts, such as informing, consoling, admonishing, and pursuing, the living. All of these functions recur, with variations in frequency, down to modern times' (Finucane, 1996: 25). Many ghosts over the centuries

have not been visible, 'their presence... revealed through the stimulation of senses other than sight', usually auditory (Davies, 2007: 26). During the seventeenth century, for example, the rustle of silk was a common sound – silk was not a fabric worn by the poor. Also, the vast majority of people died inside their homes: thus, the home was the 'natural place for the ghosts to return. It was where people mourned the dead and were surrounded by memories of their presence', with the bedroom 'most frequently the focus of ghostly visitations' (ibid: 46-47).

A major change occurred when Christianity clarified ideas about purgatory. Purgatory was for 'those who are not irredeemable but require to be punished for, and thus cleansed of, their sins before warranting admission to the Beatific Vision of God'; in contrast, 'limbo' accommodated 'those just people who died before knowing Christ, including virtuous pagans and infants who died before receiving baptism' (Maxwell-Stuart, 2006: 46). Communication with dead saints through dreams or visions was already well established as an experience. Purgatory 'provided a greatly expanded stage on which these confrontations could occur. Of course medieval folk had seen apparitions of the 'ordinary' dead before the high Middle Ages, but after purgatorial doctrine was disseminated, the gates to the otherworld were thrown wide open' (Finucane, 1996: 59). Jews and Christians shared many beliefs about 'demons, angels, ghosts and magic', on a popular level (ibid: 66). Many reports of apparitions emphasised Church teachings about 'avoiding damnation or escaping from purgatory' (ibid: 71), but the ghosts operated on other levels as well – 'quelling anxious doubts about the afterlife... [and] stepping in when necessary to restore social imbalances, to remedy injustices in the secular realm' (ibid: 75).

But the late-medieval Church was under attack. By the reign of Elizabeth I, England was passing through a Reformation which led to the banishment of ghosts. Purgatory was denied: only heaven and hell were allowed as post-death states. Protestant apparitions 'could only be demonic, angelic or illusory' (ibid: 92). But during the second half of the seventeenth century, many ghost stories were published, the most famous collections from a small circle of mostly Anglican and nonconformist clergymen wishing to 'provide additional direct evidence for the supernatural, in the form of apparitions' to refute atheism, considered a greater threat than Catholicism (ibid: 120). Joseph Glanvill (1636-80), for example, 'did not think it beneath his dignity to go out and visit the site of a reputed poltergeist haunting (at Tedworth in 1661) and

compose a detailed account of the event' (ibid: 121). Like Glanvill, other writers such as John Aubrey and John Beaumont were members of the recently-formed Royal Society. Beaumont, publishing in 1705, sums up the 'paradoxes and the common traits of the men responsible for this outburst of psychic reporting' (ibid: 124-125); a scientist, geologist and surgeon, he developed a deep interest in apparitions.

During the eighteenth century, witnesses 'went on reporting the same old motifs' (ibid: 153). But the intellectual environment was changing. Whereas Christian Platonists collected ghost stories as evidence of divinity, 'now such activities belonged to the inelegant world of the 'vulgar'... Belief in ghosts was... merely a sign of ignorance and gross superstition... Apparitions, then, no longer played an important part in the serious debates of the articulate' (ibid: 165). The supernatural became secular and polarised, and as ghosts' previous moral mission was lost, this increased the number of purposeless or evil ones. The 'eighteenth century's overpowering confidence that nature was subdued and irrational fears abolished' meant belief in the supernatural went underground. There 'simply became less and less for ghosts to do – except hang round aimlessly and cause mischief... They could only be illusory, private experiences or meaningless, inharmonious intrusions' (Bennett, 1987: 176-177). Thus there were 'malicious poltergeists' who could 'create domestic disturbances, injure the living, pull bedclothes off sleepers or even get into bed with them' (ibid: 168). Alternatively, there were ghosts who merely 'flittered about, closed doors mysteriously or were heard softly sighing, spitting and coughing on the stairs and in the corridors' (ibid).

Francis Grose, in a 1787 parody, exaggerated some common clichés:

'The room in which the head of a family had died was for a long time untenanted, particularly if they had died without a will... but if any discontented maiden, or love-crossed bachelor, happened to dispatch themselves in their garters, the room where the deed was perpetrated became forever after uninhabitable, and not infrequently nailed up. If a drunken farmer, returning from market, fell from Old Dobbin, and broke his neck... that spot was ever after haunted and impassable. In short, there was scarcely a bye-lane or cross-way but had its ghost... Almost every ancient manor house was haunted by one or other of its former masters or mistresses... and as for the churchyards, the number of ghosts that walked there, according to the village computation, almost equalled the living parishioners' (in Bennett, 1987: 180).

Despite such mockery, an appetite for supernatural stories continued. Thus 'chapbooks catering for popular taste came off the presses, giving accounts of ghostly apparitions... complete with illustrations, while pamphlets in large numbers took journalistic pains to claim the truth of their narratives in extensive title pages' (Maxwell-Stuart, 2006: 175). The Gothic novel was also popular during this period, and often included 'the haunted house, the family's secrets, endangered inheritances, imprisonment and escape, the encounter with the unspeakable, and, indeed, ghosts themselves' (Brogan, 1998: 1-2). The fashion for ghost stories continued into the nineteenth century. Interest in ghosts was, for example, revived through the influence of the Romantic Movement, a reaction against the social and environmental changes brought about by industrialisation and rationalism. Elsewhere, a Victorian trope concerned the animation of common household objects for uncanny effect; dolls were ripe for such treatment, in ghost stories such as Vernon Lee's *The Doll* (1899), and, later, M R James's *The Haunted Doll's House* (1931). A developing fascination with the unconscious also meant that many stories evolved into the 'subtle psychological studies' of Henry James and Edith Wharton and the 'surrealist nightmares' of H P Lovecraft (Brogan, 1998: 5).

But it was the evolution of scientific technologies which in particular created new manifestations and forums for connecting the immaterial world of the supernatural with the material world of matter. In one move, for example, these were utilised for acts of artful deception. During the early nineteenth century, the first phantasmagoria shows were staged in England. These extended a technique by which screens or mirrors deflected the audience's attention from a 'magic' lantern, where ghostly images were projected onto smoke. The 'ability of magic lantern operators to conjure up such spirit images led to the blurring of the boundaries between theatre, necromancy and natural magic' (Davies, 2007: 191). But the development of back projection onto a screen 'gave the lantern ghost... an apparent life of its own' (ibid: 193). In 1804, when the popularity of phantasmagoria shows were at their peak, *The Times* reported on a ghost in St James's Park, London; a soldier in the Coldstream Guards had seen a 'headless woman wandering the place' in the early hours of the morning (ibid: 199). The paper assumed that the ensuing panic was the result of someone walking around in a ghost disguise – there had been a recent such hoax at Hammersmith. But the soldier was so shocked by his experience that he had to be taken to hospital. A couple of nights later, a 'hardened war veteran, when on guard at the same spot, also saw the headless woman enter the park... He deserted his post and subsequently fell into fits and joined the first soldier in

hospital' (ibid: 200). After several further sightings, the newspaper launched an investigation. It discovered that the ghost was a phantasmagoria created by two Westminster School scholars, who had set up their equipment in an empty house – a 'classic example of the way in which new technology could be used to enforce the belief in ghosts as well as debunk it' (ibid: 201).

The development of the telegraph, telephone, and later television and other technological devices, brought the outside into the domestic interior, the far and distant into the intimate spaces of the parlour. According to commentaries by Marina Warner (2006) and Roger Luckhurst (2002), these developments contributed profoundly to changing ideas about the uncanny and supernatural: 'The emergence of a scientific culture... produced... less predictable effects: strange, unforeseen knowledges, hybrid and ephemeral notions that emerged as compromise formations melding apparently discrete systems... [including] the emergence, in 1882, of the concept of telepathy from the new science of psychical research' (Luckhurst, 2002: 10).

Developments in the natural sciences and psychology also 'offered places for ghosts to rise up: in 'radiant matter', in vibrations of the ether, in the organic sparking of synapses' (Warner, 2006: 3). One outcome was an idea that the camera could 'perhaps apprehend the spirit body in a way that fallible human eyes could not' (ibid). The earliest spirit photograph was exhibited in 1860 at a meeting of the American Photographic Society: a photograph of a chair containing a small boy who, it was claimed, had not been in the studio at the time the photograph was taken (Maxwell-Stuart, 2006: 193). The most famous spirit photographer of the period was William Mumler, who claimed to be a medium helping spirits visually 'materialise' through film. Spiritualists were not convinced and attacked him as a fraud; he was brought to trial in 1869, but acquitted. Spirit photography came to London in March 1872, in the studio of Frederick Hudson. Again, 'accusations of fraud followed an initial rush of interest' (ibid: 193-194). The most notorious photographic apparitions were created in 1917 when two cousins took photographs of fairies 'dancing in the dell below their house' (Warner, 2006: 233). The 'Cottingly Fairy Photographs' were a 'sensation... widely accepted as true'. Even Sir Arthur Conan Doyle 'gave them his unequivocal endorsement' (ibid).

Interest in spirit photography coincided with the phenomenon of 'table-rapping', 'table-turning' or 'Spiritualism'. Table-rapping began at Hydesville in up-state New York in 1848. Two teenage sisters, Kate and Margaret Fox, were found to have mediumistic powers. Ghosts manifested through raps which were 'quickly regulated into a code whereby meaningful answers to questions posed by the living could be given by the dead' (Maxwell-Stuart, 2006: 195-196). The girls' growing fame generated 'extraordinary interest in Spiritualism in many different forms' (ibid). When one confessed in 1888 she had faked the noises by popping toe and knee joints, enthusiasm wasn't diminished. 'Spirit writing on slates or paper, communications via the planchette, and materialisations of the dead through ectoplasm [a strange white substance emitted by mediums]... rapidly became commonplace in both the United States and Europe. These séances answered a deep-felt need... provid[ing] the living with a means of retaining contact with the dead' (ibid). The medium, usually a woman, entered a 'cabinet', a small area screened by curtains, in which she seated herself and went into a trance (ibid: 199). Spirits might then appear, taking the form of human shapes, making musical sounds, or uttering words.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Spiritualist séances were flourishing; 'emotional tensions' generated by the First World War 'provided an extra stimulus to the public's interest in death' (ibid: 217). By 1944, there were a thousand Spiritualist churches and fifty thousand home circles (ibid: 219). In a notorious case, Scottish medium Helen Duncan held a séance in Portsmouth in the same year, where she revealed that two British ships had been sunk. She was arrested and became the last person to be prosecuted under the 1735 Witchcraft Act (ibid).

But as interest in Spiritualism has waned, popular fascination with ghosts and hauntings has continued unabated. National and local tourist organisations reproduce local ghost narratives as part of 'heritage' place marketing strategies, including publications, themed nights and walking ghost tours. One North American travel guide explains: 'Harmless but interesting haunts add a certain romantic cachet to a house that... can enhance property values. Similarly, the odd phantom footstep or spectral sigh, assuming there's an eerie story attached, can make the difference between a mediocre bed-and-breakfast and a booming destination hotel' (Foreman, 1999: 57). This literature tends to replicate old tropes of ghosts' past lives and deaths. The guide describes 'favourable' locations to hunt for ghosts, explaining that they congregate around 'hot spots' such as

battlefields, cemeteries, hospitals, and sites of violent crime: 'They may turn up at the scene of some long-ago act of violence, attracted, experts believe, by the dense psychic imprints etched on the surroundings... Ghosts also like hotels and schools because of their thick strata of psychic residues. And spirits, attracted by the intense emotions expressed on the stage, seem to like theatres... [But] sometimes ghosts don't flock to a place but simply live there because they always have. Haunted houses are usually inhabited by former residents, although now and then a spectral newcomer may do the haunting' (Foreman, 1999: 65-66).

Ghost stories also continue to proliferate as subjects of film (in particular, as part of the horror movie genre), television and other media, reflecting a continuing fascination with the supernatural. According to a recent survey of April 2009 by think tank Theos, four in ten Britons (and fifty per cent of Londoners) claim to believe in ghosts and the supernatural (Theos, 2009: website) – a similar number to a 1998 MORI poll which suggested forty per cent of people believed in ghosts and fifteen per cent had had a personal experience (MORI, 1998: website). Ghosts have also found 'fresher haunts': thousands of web sites offer internet users information, discussions and personal stories about ghosts and hauntings (Edwards, 2001: 83). The proliferation of digital technology and internet usage has also increased the focus on ghost images. Unlike earlier instances, such photographs have not always been perceived as the result of intentional fakery. For example, Peter Underwood, previous president of the Ghost Club, describes how a photograph of the Tulip Staircase at Greenwich's Queen's House showed a 'shrouded figure... clearly visible clutching the stairway rail' (Underwood, 1996: 71). It was submitted to experts, who 'all agreed that there was no trickery, or manipulation, or double-exposure, or any duplicity as far as the transparency was concerned' (ibid: 72). He concludes: 'The Greenwich Ghost photograph is the most remarkable and interesting one I have seen in half a century of serious psychical investigation' (ibid).

Meanwhile, popular ghost accounts abound in print. In 2004, actress Joanna Lumley, for example, recalled moving into a haunted home. She tells this story: 'One man, having delivered his burden, turned to go back up the stairs... as he passed me he suddenly leaned his face very close to mine and said in a loud rasping growl, 'Leave – this – place!' I stood quite still and he stamped up the stairs. He wore an old leather jerkin, the type that coalmen have, and a whitish shirt and a flat cap... 'I shall report him to the supervisor', I thought; my heart was beating in my throat and I couldn't tell if I

was afraid or angry – both, perhaps. But now you’ve guessed the end of the story: when I got up to the front drive where the removal lorry was parked there was no man dressed in that way, no man in a cap. So I kept it to myself” (Lumley, 2004: 233). Such continuing popular accounts of personal experience have been paralleled by a desire in some quarters to analyse and categorise supernatural phenomena.

Investigating Ghosts

During the second half of the nineteenth century, excited by the prospect that such phenomena could be proven using scientific criteria, a group of Cambridge friends – including philosophers Henry Sidgwick and William James, physician William Barrett, psychologist Frederic Myers, and physicist Oliver Lodge – began to investigate spiritualist claims in a series of experiments which led to the foundation of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) in 1882. *Phantasms of the Living* was published in 1886, the result of 6000 interviews. Based on its findings, the group classified different types of phenomena. Many apparitions, according to the SPR’s research, stuck to ‘traditional’ themes. The ghosts returned ‘to convey a message, fulfil a pact with the living, or reveal the existence of lost items or treasure-trove’ (Maxwell-Stuart, 2006: 201). Others gave ‘unexpected notice that they had died’ – as described, a common motif during the Middle Ages (ibid). Most ghosts also appeared fully clothed – another continuity between medieval and modern times; ghosts thus conformed to ecclesiastical and (later) Victorian propriety, an issue ‘discussed earnestly’ during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Finucane, 1996: 82). Haunted houses also figure frequently, but more apparitions were of complete strangers, in contrast to earlier times when ghosts ‘were almost always known to the viewer’ (ibid).

The SPR continues to exist (www.spr.ac.uk), as does another organisation, The Ghost Club (www.ghostclub.org.uk), which claims to be older than the SPR. But interest in the ‘scientific’ study of certain types of anomaly also moved to the university laboratory. In 1911, Stanford University in the US was the first institution to study extra sensory perception and psychokinesis. In 1937, Joseph Rhine published an influential book on experiments at Duke University, *New Frontiers of the Mind*, which popularised the term ‘parapsychology’, coined at the end of the nineteenth century. By the 1970s, interest in this research had increased and expanded, including, for example,

work on hauntings, telepathy, reincarnation, and clairvoyance; but the field has since diminished. There are still three main university centres in the UK, at Edinburgh, Liverpool, and Northampton. Professor Richard Wiseman, at Hertfordshire, has been an influential individual exponent of parapsychological experiments outside the laboratory, often attracting wide media attention. Recently, he led research at Hampton Court Palace and Edinburgh's South Bridge Vaults, concluding that those who reported phenomena 'may have been influenced by localised environmental stimuli such as magnetic fields and lighting levels' (Davies, 2007: 97-98. See also Wiseman et al., 2003).

In popular culture, the classification of ghosts also continues. One recent book, for example, suggests seven categories: once-sentient ghosts, inanimate ghosts (ghosts of objects which 'have never been sentient'), poltergeists, doppelgangers, time slips, elemental ghosts, and, rather vaguely, 'miscellaneous ghost phenomena' (Karl, 2004: 20-21).

On-location research into alleged supernatural phenomena has expanded in particular as an activity mostly of amateurs. Media representations of investigations have both been aided by and also influenced the popularisation of ghost hunting as a pastime. This has taken on a particular set of cultural normatives. The ghost hunter is not so much 'driven by the desire to prove profound truths about religion and the human condition... as by the thrill of the hunt and the prospect of perhaps one day finally coming face to face with spirits' (Davies, 2007: 95). One early model for the modern ghost hunter is William Hope Hodgson's *Carnacki the Ghost Finder* (1913) – a series of stories about a fictional Edwardian psychic investigator. Another influential book, of 1936, was Harry Price's *Confessions of a Ghost-Hunter*. That year, Price took part in the first live broadcast from a haunted house: a BBC Radio transmission from Dean Manor, Rochester. 'Listeners heard how a ghost hunter went about his business, sprinkling wax and powdered starch on the floor to detect footprints, wiping powdered graphite on the walls to test fingerprints, human or otherwise, and setting thermometers to detect any sudden drop in temperature that might herald the clammy coldness of a ghost' (ibid).

Modern ghost hunters employ more sophisticated scientific instrumentation. One recent manual, for example, offers advice on a 'toolbox' of audio and video equipment to 'record the activities of the haunting' (Spencer and Spencer, 1998: 369). Digital

technologies have become highly valued, considered to be particularly sensitive in picking up subtle manifestations of the supernatural. Elsewhere, Karl offers advice on kit for the 'advanced' ghost hunter. This should include a single lens reflex camera, electronic voice phenomena (EVP; for recordings of extremely low frequency), geophysical equipment, ion detectors and negative ion generators, a closed circuit television system, movement sensors, and an infra-red video camera (Karl, 2004: 58-61).

Famous Hauntings

These ghost hunting investigations have evolved distinctive traditions and mores. Part of their popularity stems from a legacy of famous cases of haunted homes and paranormal events, many of which were taken up by the media. Like previous famous cases, their validity was often deeply contested, and claims were often debunked by investigators. But, again, the possibility of deception did not seem to dampen public enthusiasm for such accounts. During the eighteenth century, for example, perhaps the most sensational and popular event took place in Cock Lane, London. A young woman, Fanny Lynes, who died in 1760, returned to her previous rented room, alarming the landlord. The case was reported in newspapers; sightseers – including Samuel Johnson and Horace Walpole – came in droves 'to hear Fanny give one knock to signify 'Yes' to a question and two knocks for 'No'' (ibid). The focus of attention was the landlord's twelve-year old daughter, Elizabeth. The discovery of a block of wood in her bed in 1762 – used to make knocking and scratching sounds – exposed the haunting as a fraud. But this 'made no difference to the public's interest in all manifestations of the preternatural' (Maxwell-Stuart, 2006: 180).

One famous early twentieth century event occurred when two upper class English ladies visited Versailles, France, in August 1901. Walking in the gardens by the Petit Trianon – built for Marie Antoinette in 1774 – the women lost their way. They asked directions of two men in old-style grey coats, who they assumed to be gardeners, and noted other people in the dress of an earlier age. Eventually they concurred that something odd had happened, and set out to write their accounts, concluding they may have entered a 'time slip'. The result was *An Adventure* (1911), which became the focus of major debate and analysis for decades. Lucille Iremonger's *The Ghosts of Versailles* (1956), for example,

notes this response: 'Their adventure... was sensationally received and has come to be regarded as one of the best authenticated ghost stories of all time... For fifty odd years it has commanded the respectful attention not only of the tellers of tales by the inglenook but of philosophers, scientists, scholars and sceptics of standing, and wherever it has been mentioned... passionate controversy has always ensued' (Iremonger, 1956: 22).

During the twentieth century, a number of houses have been claimed as the 'most haunted' in England. Borley Rectory in Essex is perhaps the most famous, investigated during the 1930s by Harry Price. The rectory, built in 1863, was the subject of a *Daily Mail* article in 1929, describing ghost sightings. Price interviewed the inhabitants, and claimed to have witnessed poltergeist phenomena himself, including smashed pottery, displaced objects, banging doors, wall writings, and singing. After the rectory became empty, he leased it for a year in 1937 to investigate further. After Price's death in 1948, allegations of fraud were made, and his research re-examined. In a book published in 1956, a group of researchers concluded that 'nothing much out of the ordinary had happened at Borley Rectory during Price's stay' (Guiley, 1994: 49). The writers claimed that 'Price's data was vague and subjective, and he gave unsubstantiated accounts and theories. He magnified incidents which were commonplace into events of great paranormal import [and] omitted information from his reports which considered normal causes' (ibid). But the rectory had caught the imagination of researchers, and reports of phenomena continued to be attributed to the site, even after the rectory burned down in 1939.

More recent haunted house investigations have also captured popular attention. One example from the late 1970s is that of the Enfield Poltergeist. A family home in the London suburb was subject to poltergeist activity, including children's beds moving, shuffling sounds, loud knocks, flying marbles and Lego bricks (ibid: 108). Police officers, journalists and investigators witnessed the phenomena. But when SPR researchers visited, 'all they saw was trickery' (ibid: 109). Like Borley Rectory, the case 'appears to be one which began with some genuine phenomena', but which then degenerated, 'probably prompted by the attention the case received from the media and from the investigators' (ibid).

Another famous faked twentieth century haunting was *consciously* staged as a spoof. 'Ghostwatch' was broadcast on BBC One on Halloween, 1992. Recorded weeks before,

the programme was presented as a 'live' television investigation into a haunted home. An evil ghost, Mr Pipes, is the centre of a range of dramatic phenomena, eventually descending into farcical chaos. The BBC received numerous complaints, leading it to impose a limited ban on repeat broadcasts. But the recent success of formulaic haunted house television programmes, including Living TV's *Most Haunted* series – which presents 'sensational, telegenic live investigations' – have 'boosted renewed interest in the occupation of ghost hunter', and highlighted the 'rise of the medium as exorcist', as 'ghost counsellor' (Davies, 2007: 97).

These examples suggest how the fascination to tell and to hear ghost stories continues, as does the desire to authenticate (or, alternatively, debunk) supernatural phenomena. The development of media and recording technologies may have created new norms and expressions of investigation and analysis, and blurred the lines between the 'expert' and the lay investigator. But many key motifs remain the same, and the characterisations and motivations attributed to ghosts seem to have evolved in relation to the new social and cultural environment in only subtle ways. The repetition of popular assumptions and beliefs through different media channels, and their greater ease of proliferation, may explain some of these continuities, and how they have formed into a set of cultural assumptions and mores. But how far are they replicated within the contemporary haunted homes that people continue to live in? And how much importance do interview participants place on such assumptions when evaluating their experiences within the home? It is to the theme of the home – its definitions, contested ideals, geographies, and relationship to ideas of subjectivity – that I now turn.

Defining Home

At the heart of this project is indeed the home, within a particular Western, modern context. As an exploration of the immaterial, it is fitting that definitions of 'home' within such a context include both physical aspects (that constitute a 'house') and non-physical aspects: 'Home... is a *place*, a site in which we live. But, more than this, home is also an idea and an imaginary that is imbued with feelings. These may be feelings of belonging, desire and intimacy (as, for instance, in the phrase, 'feeling at home'), but can also be feelings of fear, violence and alienation' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006: 2). Definitions of home differ markedly, but most commentators accept its complex, multiple nature.¹ Architect Witold Rybczynski, for example, points to the etymology of the word 'home', stemming from the Anglo-Saxon 'ham', which 'connotes a physical 'place' but also has the more abstract sense of a 'state of being'' (Rybczynski, 1988: 62). 'Home' is 'still an ambiguous term', complains architect David Benjamin, after attempting a systematic definition; the name for a 'category of phenomena that is at once both concrete and abstract' (Benjamin, 1995: 2). Cultural theorist Angelika Bammer points to home's contradictory nature: 'Semantically, 'home' has always occupied a particularly indeterminate space: it can mean, almost simultaneously, both the place I have left and the place I am going to, the place I have lost and the new place I have taken up, even if only temporarily. 'Home' can refer to the place you grew up... the mythic homeland of your parents and ancestors that you yourself may never have actually seen, or the hostel where you are spending the night in transit... 'Home' may refer to a deeply familiar or a foreign place, or it may be no more than a passing point of reference' (Bammer, 1992: vii). In a similar vein, literary theorists Catherine Wiley and Fiona Barnes argue: 'The concept of home, much like the concept of identity, is a fertile site of contradictions demanding constant renegotiation and reconstruction... We contend that home is always a form of coalition: between the individual and the family or community, between belonging and exile, between home as safe haven and home as

¹ The idea of 'domesticity' is also complex, used to describe different familial relationships; the familiar and everyday, and by extension, 'normality'; near rather than far, as in home, not *foreign*; and the physical materiality of the home interior, a space of objects, bodies and practices. In one view, domesticity is a 'specifically modern phenomenon, a product of the confluence of capitalist economics, breakthroughs in technology, and Enlightenment notions of individuality' (Reed, 1996: 7).

imprisonment or site of violence, and finally between home as place and home as metaphor' (Wiley and Barnes, 1996: xv).

Contested Ideals

The idea of 'home', then, is for some people indeterminate, a fitting place for ghosts perhaps. As Bammer suggests, home is also often described as a set of ideals such as 'belonging', 'privacy', and 'sanctuary'. The architect Amos Rapoport, for example, considers only positive definitions of 'home', as if these were innate qualities: permanence and continuity, refuge from outside world, indicator of personal status, security and control (Rapoport, 1995: 25). The concept of 'privacy' is central to many definitions of the domestic interior. Sociologist Lyn Richards offers three notions: privacy for haven, community, emotional security, historically located in the bourgeois family; privacy to build stable family units, related to autonomy and independence; and privacy from others, the antithesis of community. Family life, she adds, is about all three definitions (Richards, 1990: 100).

These ideal attributes might well be challenged by the haunted home, and an aim of this project is to explore the extent to which participants continue to hold them as expectations of home life. Within wider literatures of home, these ideals are already contested. Psychoanalytical critic Elizabeth Wright points out that 'every society tends to approach home and family with an implicit ideal about both' (Wright, 1990: 213): 'the model home functions as a powerful ideology within a society... as object and ideal, seemingly without controversy, this notion of home contains and obscures innumerable conflicts'.² The 'appearance of a "nice home"' can 'cover over emotional and physical violence within all sorts of households... We should never forget that, like all ideals, "home" is not necessarily all we would have it mean' (ibid: 219-220). Anthropologist Mary Douglas agrees: 'As to those who claim that the home does something stabilizing or deepening or enriching for the personality, there are as many who will claim that it cripples and stifles' (Douglas, 1993: 262). Equally, privacy is not always open to all householders; women and children often have no personal space; and

² Others describe how the ideal home has been transformed due to 'changing social relationships between, for example, husbands and wives, parents and children, householders and servants' (Chapman and Hockey, 1999: 4). For work on homes through the life cycle, see: Young, 2005; Sibley, 1995a; and Rubenstein, 2001.

the idea of home as a place of safety is 'highly gendered' (Chapman and Hockey, 1999: 10). In any case, the 'ideal home' might 'afford the possibility of retreat from public view, and a place for the exercise of private dreams and fantasies, personal foibles and inadequacies; [but] in practice... it cannot be seen as a space which is beyond the gaze of the public world. However determinedly we police the boundaries of our 'private' space, it is difficult to ignore or exclude the possibility of incursions into that space' (ibid). Despite such failures, in many accounts, the 'default' ideals of home continue. Even rapid social and economic changes in the West since the end of the nineteenth century have 'done little to change the Victorian belief in the home as a private retreat within which a personal life can be enjoyed in peace and security' (Hepworth, 1999: 17). Exile, homelessness, and other states of being are often described in contrast to the positive physical and psychological sense of being 'at home'.³

Gender

Ideas about home have also been closely associated with gender politics, and this is replicated in my research, playing a major role in many participants' responses to ghosts; gender emerged as a theme in ways I had not initially envisaged. The traditional development of women's role in Western modernity – confined within the domestic interior in contrast to the 'public' sphere of civic life – has been critiqued by those 'challenging deeply-imbedded cultural scripts that defined women in terms of familial and domestic roles', viewing home 'not as a sanctuary but as a prison, a site from which escape was the essential prerequisite for self-discovery and independence' (Rubenstein, 2001: 2).⁴

Later, modernist avant-garde architects attempted to give the home a more 'male' sensibility by imposing an aesthetic of steel and glass, which 'assert(ed) their accomplishment through contrast with domesticity' (ibid: 7). Architect Le Corbusier 'inveighed against the 'sentimental hysteria' surrounding the 'cult of the house', and

³ The home as a secure and stable place has been questioned by work on mobile and displaced peoples. See Lavie and Swedenburg, 1996; Gunew, 2004. But note research suggesting homeless people create a 'sense of home' in different ways, such as Valentine, 2001.

⁴ The domestic interior was also deemed confining for *men*. Nineteenth-century French essayist Baudelaire's "Man in the Crowd", offers a sketch of the *flâneur*, who 'curses the hours he must spend indoors, when he could be out recording 'the landscapes of the great city'' (in Rubenstein, 2001: 8).

proclaimed his determination to create instead, 'a machine for living in' (ibid: 9). But others – notably the Surrealists – have countered modernism's 'masculine' rationalism, emphasising the blurred boundaries between house and householder, 'the house made "unhomely" by a superabundance of connotations' (Chapman and Hockey, 1999: 10). Others have complained: 'We architects are concerned with designing dwellings as architectural manifestations of space, structure and order, but we seem unable to touch upon the more subtle, emotional, and diffuse aspects of home. In schools of architecture we are taught to design houses and dwellings, not homes. Yet (the) dwelling has its psyche and soul in addition to its formal and quantifiable qualities' (Pallasmaa, 1995: 131).

More recently, feminists have also re-evaluated the site of home. Whilst maintaining their critique of patriarchy, many emphasise home's potential as a site of resistance. bell hooks claims political expedience in maintaining a divide between public and private realms, recalling visits to her grandparents: 'In our young minds houses belonged to women, were their special domain, not as property, but as places where all that truly mattered in life took place – the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls' (hooks, 1990: 41). Political philosopher Iris Marion Young also argues for a positive interpretation. She agrees that the 'comforts and supports of house and home historically come at women's expense', and that home as a place where 'one is confident who one is and can fall back on a sense of integrity' depends on a 'vast institutional structure that allows such a luxury of withdrawal, safety, and reflection for some at the expense of many others' (Young, 2005: 123). But she adds: 'The idea of home also carries critical liberating potential because it expresses uniquely human values' (ibid: 124): "'home" can have a political meaning as a site of dignity and resistance... [Its] value should be democratized rather than rejected' (ibid: 146).⁵

⁵ Young argues that people should have access to four 'normative values' of home: safety, individuation, privacy, and preservation. Individuation means home is an 'extension of the person's body, that space that he or she takes up' (Young, 2005: 152). Privacy refers to the 'autonomy and control a person has to allow or not allow access to her person'. And preservation means 'safeguarding the meaningful things in which one sees the stories of one's self embodied' and the 'rituals of remembrance that reiterate those stories' (Young, 2000: 154). See also Rubenstein, who argues that homesickness and nostalgia 'may have compensatory and even liberating dimensions' (Rubenstein, 2001: 3-4).

The ghost has been used as a metaphor of porosity, suggesting, with its walking-through-walls capacity, the unfixing of material space. But the ghost is also associated with very *particular* places, expressing something *distinct* about them. How far do ghosts roam beyond the 'boundaries' of home, thus calling into question the home's demarcated spaces; how far do they reinforce them? A move to rethink 'everyday' relationships to place has focused on the process of moving *through* it. Material cultural theories describe physical space as 'neither stable nor fixed, but inherently transitive, demanding connection and completion by the perceiver' (Seremetakis, 1994: 7). Influenced by writers on urban modernity such as Baudelaire, Benjamin, and de Certeau, this literature focuses in particular on the mundane act of walking, and its potential to 'remap space in ways which render space visible, create new paths through space and are enduringly reversible and flexible' (Pile, 1996: 249). An embrace of the fluid is at the heart of a number of literatures, such as a desire to unfix the representational gaze through performative acts of embodied movement through space; a kind of 'poesis, the making of something out of that which was previously experientially and culturally unmarked or even null and void' (Seremetakis, 1994: 7).⁶ The potential for such acts to resist prevailing hierarchies, boundaries, and experiences of place has received much attention. The challenge for cultural geographers is, we are told, to 'produce geographies that are lived, embodied, practiced; landscapes that are never finished or complete, not easily framed or read' (Cresswell, 2003: 280).

Focusing on the domestic interior might risk reinforcing the idea of fixed boundaries, against the tide of recent work which plays down the distinctiveness of place as an end in itself.⁷ Some geographers have argued instead for a 'relational' understanding of space, which 'conceptualises space as structured by social, economic, political and cultural aspects of social relations' (Laurie et al., 1997: 112). Geographer Doreen Massey has been influential in describing place as the 'intersection of sets of social relations which are stretched out over particular spaces. Rather than being defined in terms of a particular unique and distinctive location... the distinctiveness of place is seen

⁶ See also Butler, 1990; Gregson and Rose, 2000; Bell, 1999; Harris, 1999; and Thrift, 1997.

⁷ Bammer, for example, insists 'home' is 'neither here nor there. Rather, itself a hybrid, it is *both* here *and* there – an amalgam, a pastiche, a performance' (Bammer, 1992: ix) This move links to a wider critique of binary concepts which 'suggest the existence of discrete spaces... and they often depend on the drawing of sharp lines between the two halves within the binary category... like boundaries, or fences' (Laurie et al., 1997: 112).

to rest in the combination of social relations juxtaposed together in place and the connections they make to elsewhere' (ibid: 8). In a similar vein, 'home' has been configured as a 'set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context, and which construct place, extend across spaces and scales, and connect places' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006: 2).

For me, there is a problem in collapsing the spatial into the social: something is lost about the specificity of particular places, their hold on the imagination, their emotional or sensory uniqueness. In contrast, humanistic geographers have always argued for a need to 'capture the human experience' of living in places, which are celebrated as 'given meanings by human feelings', and explored for the significance given by the 'emotions, memories and habits of individuals' (Laurie et al., 1997: 8) – in other words to 'attend to the full richness of subjective experiences of places and spaces' (Bondi, 2005: 5-6). Humanistic geographers such as Yi-Fu Tuan have argued that a 'sense of place was part of what it was to be human... place as a part of human identity' (ibid).

The haunted home is often described using the language of distinctness, having, for example, an atmosphere which sets it apart from its surroundings. This risks essentialising and romanticising haunted places, entertaining the possibility that they exude a particular set of affects *beyond* or *despite* of their social or cultural construction, and that these are traceable by attending to people's feelings and sensations. Humanistic geographers have also been rightly critiqued for ignoring differences in people's relationship to place, and for assuming an essentialist view of both people and places, and home specifically. Can more nuanced, less generalising, research offer a place for a revived form of humanism? The key is to appreciate distinctiveness whilst also attending to social and cultural processes, and contested ideas or feelings which might inform them. Geographer Julian Holloway expresses a similar concern: 'How then to retain the notion that people do construct a sense of place, do give (emotional and valued) meaning to place, without reproducing these failings of humanistic geography?' He argues that place 'has no single essence. Rather it is constructed in a myriad of ways. Thus, the identities that are constructed in relation to it and through it can also be manifold' (Holloway, 1998: 11). We might, then, view the idea of the 'haunted home' as both general – a cultural icon with some collectively accessible meanings – and a set of uniquely experienced events within specific homes. The need is to attend to the way such experiences, and the meanings attached to them, are constructed in different ways

by different people, in different social relationships, within and beyond the home, whilst at the same time paying heed to the importance of the physical materialities and micro-geographies of these spaces, and how they are used and represented by participants. As environmental psychologist Perla Korosec-Serfaty argues: 'Though it is true that no space may be seen as either affectively neutral or devoid of social meaning, it is nevertheless the dialectics of uses and representations which determine the successive meanings of places' (Korosec-Serfaty, 1984: 304). If participants talk of the distinctiveness of particular places within their homes, we need to respect that this is the way they frame their experience. There is a danger of imposing ideas or ideals which *should* rather than *do* work on the level of everyday 'reality' for people, even if they are out of step with current theory. Richards, for example, warns that a 'suspicion remains that the hard core of the nuclear family is still home to the private haven... However distorting and inappropriate to the patterns of social change, the division of private and public worlds remains the background to family life' (Richards, 1990: 100). The 'ideal' of family is the *wrong* ideal for Richards. But who is to say that this is – or should be – people's experience?

Allowing room for the material geographies of specific domestic interiors also acknowledges fixity, continuity and 'sedimentation' as part of experience, in contrast to the focus of much recent work on mobility and change.⁸ This allows for a sense of belonging, a feeling of 'being at home', to develop *over time*, through familiarisation and the repetition of habits. Iris Marion Young, for example, talks of an idea of home 'attached to a particular locale as an extension and expression of bodily routines' (Young, 2005: 150). Geographers Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling also acknowledge home as 'lived as well as imagined. What home means and how it is materially manifest are continually created and re-created through everyday home-making practices' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006: 254). Phenomenologist Edward Casey argues that the body forms 'habit memories' in the process of coming to dwell in a place' (in Young, 2005: 139): 'One comes to feel settled at home in a place through the process of interaction between the living body's movement to enact aims and purposes and the material things among which such activities occur. The things and their arrangement bear witness to the sedimentation of lives lived there... The process of sedimentation through which

⁸ Sociologist John Urry, for example, argues that the emotions are 'all judgements from afar, abstract and mobile' (Urry, 2005: 82). Elsewhere, John Law and Ingunn Moser describe desire as something that is 'mobile in character, shifting and displacing itself, never easily pinned down' (Law and Moser, 1999).

physical surroundings become home as an extension and reflection of routines also deposits meaning onto things. Material things and spaces themselves become layered with meaning and personal value as the material markers of events and relationships that make the narrative of a person or group' (ibid: 139-140).

Suburbs, where some of my interviewees live, have been associated with the mobility of the middle classes – a socio-economic twist, perhaps, on the assumption, as described, that no one 'ever stays long' in a haunted house. But sociologist David Morley warns that ideas about the mobile society should not be overplayed. Despite claims that the 'paradigmatic modern experience is that of rapid mobility over long distances', he points to a contrasting argument that this 'model of contemporary life' is 'strictly applicable only to a relatively small number of highly privileged people' (Morley, 2000: 13). The 'idea of postmodernity' is filled with images of 'our supposedly de-territorialised culture of "homelessness": images of exile, diaspora, time-space compression, migrancy and "nomodology"'. The concept of home often remains as the uninterrogated anchor or alter ego of all this hyper-mobility' (ibid). He accepts that traditional ideas of 'home, homeland and nation' have been destabilised, 'both by new patterns of physical mobility and migration and by new communication technologies which routinely transgress the symbolic boundaries around the private household and the nation state' (ibid: 2-3). But he points to evidence of 'continued sedentarism on the part of the majority of the population' (ibid: 14). Questions such as the way household ghosts become knitted into family or neighbourhood place-based 'genealogy' become important. Certainly, it would be interesting to discover how far a sedentary population is required for circulating ghost stories to take hold. Allowing for this possibility could yield insights that might otherwise be missed.⁹

⁹ Writer Peter Ackroyd also claims to see 'lines of continuity' on the streets of London, some of which are to do with feelings attached to these places: 'It is possible... that an unpleasant or unhappy atmosphere may persist like some noisome scent in the air' (Ackroyd, 2000: 271). See also Pratt and Hanson on the 'geography of placement', where everyday local experiences and relationships create 'a stickiness to identity that is grounded in the fact that many [women's] lives are lived locally' (Pratt and Hanson, 1994: 25).

SELF AND HOME

The development of the 'private' space of the home was also central to a modern sense of an interior self, according to historians: 'Just as one did not have a strongly developed self-consciousness, one did not have a room of one's own' (Rybczynski, 1988: 34); 'before the idea of the home as the seat of family life could enter the human consciousness, it required the experience of both privacy and intimacy, neither of which had been possible in the medieval hall' (ibid: 48). The 'evolution of domestic comfort' was 'much more than a simple search for physical well-being; it begins in the appreciation of the house as a setting for an emerging interior life' (ibid: 35-36). The bourgeois idea of home as a private retreat emerged in eighteenth century France and England, closely linked to the 'new ideals of domesticity' that were 'associated with the characteristics of the modern family' (Hareven, 1993: 232). For the German writer Walter Benjamin, the interior was 'Janus-faced'. On the one hand, it was 'a sanctuary from which the world could be safely observed' – 'a box in the world-theatre'; on the other hand, it was a 'stage on which one's most intimate feelings could be acted out with the greatest authenticity' (Sidlauskas, 1996: 65).

The private place, then, is where the self can 'be itself' – more 'authentic', less constructed than the self that performs its social, public role. This idea persists. Phenomenologists such as architect Juhani Pallasmaa seem invested in reinforcing a division between public and private, in order to lyricise about home as a place to 'hide secrets': 'We have private and social personalities; home is the realm of the former. Home is the place where we hide our secrets and express our private selves. Home is our place of resting and dreaming in safety' (Pallasmaa, 1995: 138). Tuan was influential in promoting such ideas: 'Consider the sense of an "outside" and an "inside", of intimacy and exposure, of private life and public space. People everywhere recognize these distinctions... Constructed form has the power to... accentuate... the difference in emotional temperature between "inside" and "outside"' (Tuan, 1977: 107).

Elsewhere, psychological theories are also mined to explore people's personal relationships with home. Philosopher Gaston Bachelard discusses the 'archetypal... dream house of the mind', concluding that the 'existence of an attic and a cellar are essential, because the attic is the symbolic storage place for pleasant memories that the dweller wants to return to, whereas the cellar is the final hiding place for unpleasant

memories; both are needed for our mental well-being' (ibid: 133). This assertion simplistically characterises the house's extremities as symbolic of negative and positive aspects of psyche, the house becoming a depository of the personal past. But the idea that we reflect ourselves in home objects has become important. Anthropologists traditionally focus on the non-Western home as a space 'symbolically interpreted as a visual model of the tribe's or the group's cosmology and social hierarchy' (Cieraad, 1999: 2). Elsewhere, architect Clare Cooper Marcus uses Jungian theory to describe the interplay between selves and objects: 'People consciously and unconsciously "use" their home environment to express something about themselves' (Marcus, 1995: 9). The physical environment displays 'messages from the unconscious'. Unable to comprehend 'all that is encapsulated in the psyche, we need to place it "out there" for us to contemplate, just as we need to view our physical body in a mirror' (ibid: 17). Objects, like people, she claims, come in and out of our lives and awareness in a 'clearly patterned framework', setting the stage for 'greater self-understanding' (ibid: 11).¹⁰

Situating Subjectivity

Some theorists, then, have utilised ideas from phenomenology, humanism and existentialism to 'privilege an idea of home as grounding of identity, an essential place... Home [as] an anchoring point through which human beings are centred' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006: 11). Such work has been criticised for failing to account for, as geographer Liz Bondi argues, how, for example, 'human action, consciousness and individuality are produced and shaped by non-conscious, non-individual and non-human processes' (Bondi, 2005: 3-4). Metaphors of transition have been employed to think beyond the relationship between home and self as static and separate. Sociologist Anne-Marie Fortier develops Elspeth Probyn's notion of identity as threshold, 'a location that by definition frames the passage from one space to another; identity as transition, always producing itself through the combined processes of being and becoming' (Fortier, 2000: 2). The move towards ideas of 'home' as unfixed and multi-local is part of a parallel move to destabilise the idea of the discreet, bounded, Enlightenment 'self'. Geographer Benedikt Korf describes this move: 'The modernist conception of the autonomous 'subject' which is centred, sovereign, and coherently

¹⁰ David Miller also focuses on the 'cultural practices that occur within, and create, house as home', in particular advocating 'returning our gaze to objects or things... because our social worlds are constituted through materiality' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006: 23). See also Miller, 2001; and Miller, 2005.

rational and acts intentionally, knowledgeably, and volitionally has been challenged from a variety of sources. A widely accepted view in poststructuralist writings holds that the subject has become *subjected* to the workings of power, language, and desire and is not the main or most relevant origin of action', whilst some feminist authors 'argue that the identity of any self is performed and reconstituted within acts... Posthumanism disaggregates, distributes and dislodges the human subject. The subject becomes local, fluid, and contingent... [whilst] non-representational theory emphasizes... emotional liberty... All these critiques tend to invigorate intersubjective, performative, and contingent aspects of the formation of a subject' (Korf, 2008: 715). The idea of the 'subject' has been important for academic research since the 1960s. The editors of a new journal, *Subjectivity*, describe the influence of Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan – for whom the subject is 'created through signs'; then Antonio Gramsci and Stuart Hall, for whom the subject could 'resist... the dominant culture' (Blackman et al., 2008: 2); through to poststructuralism, and the influence of Michel Foucault, who believed that subjectivity is 'produced through the play of power/knowledge' (ibid: 4-5).

A recent turn towards ideas of emotion and a particular definition of affect continues this project to unfix self and place, shifting attention from individual selves to ephemeral aspects of life which are beyond the personal or move *between* people. A group of geographers recently argued for a 'non-objectifying' view of emotions as 'relational flows, fluxes and currents, in-between people and places rather than 'things' or 'objects' to be studied or measured' (Davidson et al., 2005: 3). Emotions, they argue, 'help to construct, maintain as well as sometimes to disrupt the very distinction between bodily interiors and exteriors' (ibid: 7). Cultural theorist Sara Ahmed also argues against 'an assumption of interiority' (Ahmed, 2004: 8). Emotions 'create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place... the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others' (ibid: 10).¹¹

Elsewhere, work by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze has introduced the idea of 'subject-as-process' (Blackman et al., 2008: 8). Non-representational geographers focus

¹¹ The move to rethink emotion is useful for testing a cultural assumption that haunted homes are always the realm of *extreme* emotion. Extreme responses, perhaps, are easier to trace than subtle ones. Fear, for example, is 'felt in the body; the root of 'horror' is a Latin word meaning 'to bristle' and 'to shiver' (Rosenheim, 1997: 54).

on a related idea of affect as a 'force' or 'field', an 'intensity' of relationships through which matter is 'always coming into being' (Latham and McCormack, 2004: 709). An affect, cultural theorist Eric Shouse explains, is a 'non-conscious experience of intensity' which cannot be fully realised in language (Shouse, 2005: 1). Geographer Nigel Thrift describes affect as dependent on a 'sense of push in the world... [including] the capacity of interaction that is akin to a natural force of emergence' (Thrift, 2004: 62). Elsewhere, a group of geographers describe affects as 'not about you or it, subject or object. They are relations that inspire the world [which]... extract from representation another way of judging, another way of reacting to the world about us. There is a need... to move towards an account that takes seriously the world's own forces... a world between potential and determination' (Dewsbury et al., 2002: 439).

The latter work provides an alternative for those seeking to go beyond Cartesian binaries. But for many researchers, myself included, there is a wish to maintain space for a 'subject' which can be granted some sense of a coherent selfhood; not doing so might be to deny a level of responsibility and choice to act, and potentially to forego further research into people's relationships to places. Many responses to the challenge attempt to square the circle of unfixing and yet maintaining forms of subjectivity. For example, Korf proclaims: 'Is humanism back? Yes, hopefully it is, but in the form of a sceptical, a postmetaphysical humanism. If the human being'[s]... life [is] unfathomable, then the ontology of possibility grounded in the openness of human life calls for an ethics that reproduces and performs this openness. This includes opening *normative* spaces for the 'more-than-human', thus avoiding a humanist metaphysical slide into 'only-humanness' (Korf, 2008: 729).

The editors of *Subjectivity*, in turn, ask if it is possible to accept Foucault's 'important arguments' about the 'production' of individuals and 'not still suggest that the "subjectivity" of such individuals is not wholly accounted for by power, discourse and historical circumstances' (Blackman et al., 2008: 6-7). They favour work linking the move to 'affect', outlined above, and 'models of psychical or neurological functioning that do not bring in psychological individualism through the back door' (ibid: 7), arguing: 'We are... emphatically not calling for a return to a naïve individualizing humanism, to de-socialized, a-historical categories of explanation, or to an essentialist inner mechanics of psychological functioning. However... we remain nevertheless interested in an exploration of those ostensibly psychological frameworks and

vernaculars – contingent as they may be – that may enable even a temporary hold on the unique density and complexity of subjectivity which is always more than a derivative formation’ (ibid).

Psychosocial theorists equally grapple towards a theory of ‘a type of subject that is both social and psychological, which is constituted in and through its social formations, yet is still granted agency and internality’ (Frosh and Baraitser, forthcoming). The main dilemma is finding ways to stay ‘committed to an agenda that gives value to personal experience, interconnectedness, intersubjectivity... embodiment, agency and most importantly the impulse to articulate a kind of ethical subject; while at the same time acknowledging and drawing on the complete disruption of this agenda through the force of the revelation that there is no such human subject, that what we take to be the realm of the personal, including the famous “inner world” of psychoanalysis, is either wavering, fragmentary and lost, or a thoroughly fictional entity’ (ibid).¹²

Feminist geographers struggle with a similar issue. On the one hand, they understand emotions to be ‘generated by and expressive of wider social relations’ which ‘trouble distinctions’ between ‘persons and environments’ and the ‘boundaries around individuals’ (Bondi, 2005: 6-7). On the other, they wish to acknowledge that emotion can be experienced by ‘individualised human subjectivity’ (ibid), particularly because of the ‘importance of “giving voice” to marginalised subjects’: the ‘appeal to the authority of women’s experience is one of the hallmarks of feminist work’ (ibid: 8). For this reason, geographers such as Deborah Thien find the turn to ‘affect’ problematic, the concept employed in ‘masculinist, technocratic and distancing ways’, which ‘discourages an engagement with everyday emotional subjectivities’ (Thien, 2005: 452).

Other attempts to situate the self are worth noting. In asking how certain places ‘shape a person’s subjectivity’, for example, geographer David Conradson considers the notion of the self as a ‘malleable and somewhat porous entity, able to be affected by others’ (Conradson, 2005: 104-105). But he is concerned this might lead to a form of social constructionism where the person ‘becomes merely an effect of external discourses and

¹² Within UK-based psychoanalysis, there is a difference between Kleinian and Lacanian approaches. The former tends towards a notion of a holistic individual, seeking to make narrative sense of a subject’s unconscious life; for the latter, meaning is always deferred, and the role of psychoanalysis isn’t to make sense but to examine what mechanisms and signifiers *produce* sense. For the latter, the unconscious comes into being in the relationship between analysand and analyst rather than being something hidden and already ‘there’.

practices' (ibid). He manoeuvres towards psychotherapy models, allowing the self 'a degree of centring and consistency within the relations that shape it'. Whether this 'core' of the self is biological, psychological or spiritual, he does not know. The point is the self becomes a '*somewhat* centred entity that emerges through a reflexive and relational interplay with other people and events' (ibid: 105-106).¹³

Elsewhere, geographer Ann Varley appraises the work of theorist Lois McNay, who likewise argues that the 'individual's capacity to act requires some degree of coherence in the conception of self... suggesting that there are limits to the mutability of identity' (Varley, 2008: 55): 'The celebration of indeterminacy and instability in poststructural accounts of the self contrasts with the unequivocal manner in which unitary identity is rejected... McNay seeks a more generative approach to the self, one that does not become mired in the opposition between identity and nonidentity but mediates between them' (ibid). Iris Marion Young, as described, also questions the need to 'reject entirely' the 'project of supporting identity and subjectivity embodied in the patriarchal ideology of home' (Young, 2005: 130). Is it possible, she asks, to 'retain an idea of home as supporting the individual subjectivity of the person, where the subject is understood as fluid, partial, shifting and in relations of reciprocal support with others?' (ibid: 130).

These accounts, for me, hold promise for acknowledging the complex ways in which selfhood is 'always producing itself through the combined processes of being and becoming' (Fortier, 2000: 2). Work to deny or downplay the self may be motivated by an admirable set of critical imperatives, but I agree with Thien (2005) that it runs the risk of creating a dehumanising rhetoric. Is there a way we might indeed 'ease back' on naïve notions of intact, fixed identity, whilst tracing the creative forces of influence within which individuals are created within the ongoing push and pull of the world? If continuities of place and narrative might be overlooked, might the same be said for the continuities of the self? Could it be that something happens when we withdraw into a relatively 'private' interior both geographical and psychological – a relatively stable *sense* of identity might emerge at any given moment in time? If we accept this as a possibility, the question becomes: how do people negotiate this state for themselves

¹³ This view of the self is too optimistic for some. Researcher Felicity Callard argues that Freud's formulation of the unconscious is at odds with any notion of 'progressive transformation', being a 'realm that is not malleable in terms of cultural resignification' (Callard, 2003: 295).

when conditions are not 'ideal'? We can at least allow research participants a level of self-comprehension in describing their responses to events which impinge or touch upon their sense of self-at-home. Perhaps the emphasis should be on how people attempt to manipulate or reinforce their 'place' in the world that suits them at particular times and spaces? At the same time, the move to 'affect' also offers the possibility of geographies which 'take seriously the world's own forces' (Dewsbury et al., 2002: 439), allowing for a wider redistribution of agency – pertinent for a project focusing on the interaction of human and 'non-human' forces. We can investigate such a context without de-centring the subject completely.

Self and Other

The relationship between 'self' and 'other' is a further way in which subjects are theorised, and is a key issue for this project (the 'other' that is the ghost I assume to be the strangest kind of stranger, apart from the ghosts of people one might have known in life).¹⁴ Identity is 'made in large part by a contrast to what one is not; we only understand who we are by comparing ourselves to something we claim we are not... something that we ourselves construct... describe[d] as the Other' (Laurie et al., 1997: 8-10). Theorist Teresa Brennan argues that the self-contained Western identity is a false construct which 'depends on projecting outside of ourselves unwanted affects such as anxiety and depression in a process commonly known as "othering"' (Brennan, 2004: 24). Boundaries between self and other, formed by projection, are reinforced because there is 'just too much affective stuff to dispose of, too much that is directed away from the self with no place to go', leading to the 'securing [of] a private fortress, personal boundaries, against the unsolicited emotional intrusions of the other' (ibid). Film theorist Erin Manning describes how the 'intimate and exclusionary connections between modern, normalizing discourses of the home and the nation-state' are also underpinned by a desire for security, which is 'manifested as a collective fear and a resentment of difference – fear of that which is not us, not certain, not predictable. The

¹⁴ The idea that humans have 'agency' to act, as in to make conscious, moral decisions, has come under scrutiny at the same time as the idea that non-human 'others' might also possess a form of 'agency'. The latter is at the core of Actor Network Theory, which reconfigures the 'notion of social agency by reconceptualising how power and organization must be produced... through relations between collectives of people and things' (Routledge, 2008: 200), and seeking to 'decouple the 'human/agency' binary (Whatmore, 1999: 23). One move is to describe the very hybridity of humans (see Haraway, 1997); another to emphasise the 'natural agency' of biological and technological processes, for example, within the home – the 'many different jostling actors in the home space' (Hitchings, 2004: 169).

quest for protection against the unknown results in a tightening of the corners of the nation, the home, and the self' (Manning, 2003: 33).

Elsewhere, the relationship between self and other is more complexly explored. David Morley still insists that conflict is generated in the 'process of identity formation by the attempt to expel alterity beyond the boundaries of some ethnically, culturally or civilisationally purified homogenous enclave, at whatever level of social or geographical scale'. But he suggests an alternative 'progressive' vision of home which doesn't depend on excluding 'all forms of otherness, as inherently threatening to its own internally coherent self-identity', but where self-identity itself possesses 'internal hybridity' – the 'necessary correlative to a greater openness to external forms of difference', and thus the 'condition of a more porous and less rigidly policed boundary around whatever is defined as the home community' (Morley, 2000: 6). Elsewhere, for Ahmed, the 'other' is bound up in the 'self' and sometimes recreated in its image: 'In the gesture of recognising the one that we do not know, the one that is different from 'us', we flesh out the beyond, and give it a face and form' (Ahmed, 2000b: 3).¹⁵ For Bammer, the 'other' is also a shifting aspect of self: as householders, we 'try on and play out roles and relationships of both belonging and foreignness' (Bammer, 1992: vii). Elsewhere, Varley engages with the work of theorist Jessica Benjamin to describe how 'the self can relate to an other without assimilating or excluding it' (Varley, 2008: 56). Benjamin describes a process of 'subject formation through recognition of the other's externality' (ibid). But recognition of others is only partial and doing so 'requires acceptance of their "independence and unknowability"'. We therefore must embrace 'ambiguities in the meaning of home' (ibid: 58). For Varley, such an approach allows us to think about home in ways that 'do not become trapped in the binary of exclusionary or idealised space... Housing the self... need not always mean evicting the other' (ibid).

Complicating the 'self' and 'other' binary is useful because it allows a richer context for asking: how do people living in haunted homes respond to the ambiguity and uncertainty of the uncanny other? Do participants 'create' the ghosts in their own image,

¹⁵ Ahmed points to Erving Goffman's definition of 'public life' as the 'realm of activity generated by face-to-face interactions that are organised by norms of co-mingling' (Ahmed, 2000: 22). The 'public' come to be lived through local encounters, through the very gestures and habits of meeting up with others' (ibid). Are there different norms and habits established when such gestures and habits aren't available, when encounters are with invisible and unpredictable 'others' who cannot be recognised?

or reject their alterity? Do they try to exclude or assimilate them, or does the very ambiguity of uncanny events lend itself to a more complex set of responses? And how many relationships of self and other are at work? What, for example, is given agency – the ghosts, the home, the inhabitants? Whether we accept the project to theorise boundaries between self and other as ‘false’ constructions, we need at least to ask whether people themselves create them as a way of maintaining self-space, whether other strategies are employed which work differently, and how people’s sense of self is reinforced or challenged by such a process.

Bodies and Sensations

A further move is to focus on bodies, also central to current ideas of emotion and affect, described above.¹⁶ Geographer Steve Pile describes how subjectivity is ‘more likely to be conceived of as rooted in the spatial home of the body, and... registered through a whole series of senses’ (Pile, 1995: 11). Elsewhere, this focus on bodies displaces theoretical exploration of subjectivity, ‘where bodies are not singular, bounded, closed and fixed, but rather open to being affected and affecting others... phenomenological, relational and discursive... metaphorical, cyborged, performative, disciplined, ordered, disordered, positioned, or constructed’ (Blackman et al., 2008: 12-13). As described, Sara Ahmed conceptualises the self as taking shape through bodily interaction with others. Through ‘strange encounters’, bodies are ‘both deformed and reformed; they take form through and against other bodily forms’ (Ahmed, 2000a: 86). She asks: ‘How do strange encounters, encounters in which something that cannot be named, be passed between subjects, serve to embody the subject? How do encounters with others whom we recognise as strangers take place at the level of the body? To what extent do such encounters involve, not just reading the stranger’s body, but defining the contours or boundaries of the body-at-home, through the very gestures which enable a withdrawal from the stranger’s co-presence in a given social space?’ (Ahmed, 2000a: 85). Ahmed

¹⁶ This focus suggests work linking bodily sensation to emotions, a move away from theorising emotions as tied to cognition. Merleau-Ponty’s definition of ‘perception’ locates ‘intention and consciousness in bodily awareness and sensation’, and thus offers ‘resources for rethinking the notion of selves discretely bounded from their perceptual environment’ (Bondi, 2005: 4). Ahmed however warns us not to create new false distinctions. To ‘form an impression’ might involve ‘acts of perception and cognition as well as an emotion’ (Ahmed, 2004: 6); and if ‘contact with an object generates feeling, then emotion and sensation cannot be easily separated’. The distinction between sensation and emotion ‘can only be analytic, and as such, is premised on the reification of a concept’. A focus on ‘impression’ allows her to ‘avoid making analytical distinctions between bodily sensation, emotion and thought as if they could be ‘experienced’ as distinct realms of human ‘experience’’ (ibid).

utilises Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological account of 'inter-embodiment', stressing how the 'experience of being embodied is... mediated by our continual interactions with other human and non-human bodies' (Ahmed and Stacey, 2001: 5). Similarly, we could ask how people's 'strange encounters' with ghosts create or challenge a sense of the 'body-at-home'. Could we also view the ghosts, and even the home, as different forms of 'body' pressing upon or interacting with participants' own? Some researchers have explored 'house biographies'.¹⁷ Perhaps homes also can be granted their own 'agency'? If so, how does it feel to live *within* the body of one's home? Is the relationship with the haunted home about negotiating co-habitation with the home itself as well as with the ghosts?

Elsewhere, Brennan suggests a focus on how places affect us at a *biological* level, arguing: 'Any inquiry into how one feels the others' affects, or the 'atmosphere', has to take account of physiology as well as the social and psychological in origin... The transmission of affect, if only for an instant, alters the biochemistry and neurology of the subject. The 'atmosphere' or the environment literally gets into the individual' (Brennan, 2004: 1-2).¹⁸ Affects are 'transmitted' between people and are responsible for bodily changes: 'Some are brief changes, as in a whiff of the room's atmosphere, some longer' (ibid).¹⁹ This move might replicate some of the essentialising tendencies of humanism, critiqued above. Other accounts of 'atmosphere' are even less successful. Anthropologist Paul Pennartz claims, for example, that the 'experience of atmosphere' within the home is an 'inherent aspect of habitation': 'atmosphere manifests itself as a double-sided process: the atmosphere of a room works on an individual, and conversely an individual projects his or her specific mood on the room' (Pennartz, 1999: 95). He attempts a semantic analysis of 'pleasant' and 'unpleasant' atmospheres, concluding that such experiences are 'neither irrational nor indeterminate' (ibid: 106). What remains indeterminate, for me, however, is his definition of atmosphere and claims for modelling it. We are left, again, with the only question worth asking: how do people

¹⁷ These tell the story of the 'house-as-home'... through the lives of its past and present inhabitants. The home is thus interpreted as a site of history and memory, and is brought to life through the histories, memories, imaginations and possessions of its residents' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006: 37).

¹⁸ For Brennan, affects are physiological shifts 'accompanied by a judgement', arriving 'via an interaction with other people and an environment' (Brennan, 2004: 5).

¹⁹ Environmental 'affects' as causes of hauntings are being studied by some parapsychologists, as described. For example, Dean Radin claims an ability to 'induce' ghosts in a laboratory setting: 'Our understanding of the causal couplings in the mind-body-environment system is still insufficiently sophisticated to cleanly and unambiguously piece these factors apart' (Radin, 2001: 178).

themselves describe the ‘atmosphere’ of their homes, and how might this affect their co-habitation?

THE UNCANNY HOME

I have described the ‘ideals’ attached to home, suggesting these might be challenged by the *haunted* home. This is the main theme of literary theorist Sharon Marcus’ take on a craze for fictional haunted house stories in mid-nineteenth century London, which, she argues, coincided with the suburbs ‘replicat[ing] the urban conditions they had been designed to circumvent’—crowding, transience, and subdivision into lodgings (Marcus, 1999: 116). These stories told of ‘the terror and damage inflicted by malevolent, disruptive ghosts’ (ibid: 119); the ghosts were ‘noisy, intrusive strangers’ (ibid: 124). The stories emphasised the ‘contradictions between the middle class’s domestic ideals and its dwelling practices in sensationally heightened ways... Haunted-house stories broadcast the urban deformation of the domestic ideal’ (ibid).

There are other examples of ghosts and haunted homes used as symbols of failure. Fortier points out that ‘the historical link between ‘home’ and ‘sickness’, nostalgia and loss, suggests that home, in a sense, has always been ‘*unheimlich*’. Not just the utopian place of safety and shelter for which we supposedly yearn, but also the place of dark secrets, of fear and danger, that we can sometimes only inhabit furtively’ (Fortier, 2000: xi). Geographer Maria Kaika also argues: ‘The dwelling places of modernity are hosts of the uncanny in their very structure. Once stripped of their well-constructed clarity and familiarity, or in moments of crisis, they are revealed as being themselves objects of surrealist art, pointing at the alienation of the dweller that inhabits them, subverting the image of the dwelling as the epitome of the familiar’ (Kaika, 2005: 75).

But the haunted home is most often maintained as a separate category from everyday domestic life. My Master’s dissertation, for example, described urban explorers’ experiences at a ‘haunted’, former hospital ruin (Lipman, 2004). The strange affectivity of the place, hidden within woodland and surrounded by tall fencing, created extreme

emotional responses.²⁰ But such experiences were sought and enjoyed because they took place in a particular, contained space, *away* from home. Visits to the hospital were short-lived furtive trespasses. It was the contrast with home that people enjoyed on these forays: a spatial ‘othering’ which reinforced some boundaries as it circumvented others. Haunted homes – those we *don’t* have to live in – provide release of emotional tension, according to sociologist Jenny Hockey. The ‘House of Doom’ allows us to ‘safely rehearse our terror of demons... the ghosts of unknown previous occupants... Located in fairground or carnival we confront our terrors in their proper context, as a source of fun, farce and hysteria’ (Hockey, 1999: 148). From the Victorian ghost story to the modern day horror movie, the haunted home enjoys iconic status as a popular cultural motif – but generally a *fictitious* one, suggesting a process of marginalisation and infantilisation. Perhaps this reflects a need to render what frightens us unthreatening. In a sinister twist on Hockey’s fairground haunted house, ghost researcher David Taylor believes such a building ‘scapegoats’ a community’s fears. Every local community has its haunted house, he claims, a ‘building that has become a strong cultural icon both within our conscious and subconscious minds... Its metonymy transforms the house, in the eyes of that community, into a modern representation, all be it in bricks and mortar, of a sin eater. It begins to take on and absorb the fears and concerns of that community. In extreme cases, where a violent murder has been committed in a house, that building may become derelict or, in the case of Cromwell Street, Gloucester [infamous as a house where people were murdered and buried]... national feeling demands that all trace of the building should be destroyed, reinforcing I believe the very real and strong reactions and beliefs we have about houses’ (Taylor, 1998).

In this project, the uncanny needs to be negotiated and navigated *within* habitation. The self-at-home has to allow space for an ‘other’, something both different from itself and also, in that difference, unknowable and of uncertain cause and effect. That uncertainty is both temporal – who knows what will happen next, what will happen when – and also spatial, who knows where it will happen, or how unruly it might be. The uncanny within one’s home leaves no place to escape or hide. This is in part the definition of ‘uncanny’, from the German ‘*unheimlich*’ (‘*un*’ is ‘not’; ‘*heim*’ is ‘home’; ‘*heimlich*’ is ‘secretly’

²⁰ Gothic tales, which predated psychoanalysis by nearly 200 years, also focused around bleak and secluded natural landscapes, ruins and graveyards, to emphasise something ‘out of bounds’, beyond normality and familiarity, disturbing (but also *reinforcing*) social, aesthetic and moral boundaries (see Grunenberg, 1997).

or 'secretive'). The idea of the uncanny developed from 'home' – defined as a safe place, of privacy, or a place to keep secrets – to something unfamiliar, indeterminate: where there are secret, hidden things. A commonly abbreviated definition of the uncanny is the 'strange within the familiar', denoting an intermingling of opposites which should not share the same space.

Sigmund Freud used the idea of the uncanny to counter animism, 'characterized by the idea that the world was peopled with human spirits': the uncanny a residue of such primitive beliefs (Freud, 2003: 147). Commentators note Freud was attempting to 'rein in what cannot be controlled', to 'gain victory over the dangerous fragmentation of the human mind' (Ellison, 2001: 73). He failed because the uncanny eludes coherence, representing 'that which exceeds the control of the agents of reason', in part because it is 'bound up with an *experience* of the uncanny', which 'disturbs any attempts to remain analytically detached and objective' (Bennett and Royle, 1995: 39). Such an experience 'is not something simply present like an object in a painting. It is, rather, an effect. In this respect it has to do with how we read or interpret... the uncanny is not so much *in* the text we are reading: rather, it is like a foreign body within *ourselves*' (ibid).

Freud's essay has been influential. Some researchers, for example, play on the uncanny home as a place of secrets or hiding places.²¹ Some suggest the uncanny is about unfamiliarity or estrangement, whilst others, such as artist Mike Kelley, explore a more personal sense of elusive memories, strong emotions, and bodily sensations, attempting to conjure what is just out of reach: 'The uncanny is apprehended as a physical sensation... tied to the act of remembering'. Past feelings are 'provoked by a confrontation between 'me' and an 'it' that was highly charged, so much so that 'me' and 'it' became confused. The uncanny is a somewhat muted sense of horror: horror tinged with confusion. It produces 'goose bumps' and is 'spine tingling'. It also seems related to *déjà vu*, the feeling of having experienced something before, the particulars of that previous experience being unrecallable, except as an atmosphere that was 'creepy' or 'weird'. But if it was such a loaded situation, so important, why can the experience not be remembered?' (Kelley, 2004).²²

²¹ Fletcher, for example, explores connections between the queer, uncanny and 'closet' in Henry James' ghost stories (Fletcher, 2000: 57). Stewart draws on ideas of the uncanny in her study of Anne Frank, where the 'secret annexe' in which she hid was a 'home which is distinctly unhomely' (Stewart, 2003: 86).

²² This notion of the uncanny is more akin to an inner psychological state of being 'haunted' by the memories of the past. The 'idea of ghosts is very close to the archaeological imagination... The disappeared, the past and how such spectres enthrall us, at once horrifying and comforting' (Buchli and Lucas, 2001: 11-12).

Kelley suggests the uncanny's potential to confuse boundaries. Others, similarly, have described it as 'that ambivalent structure of the civil state as it draws its rather paradoxical boundary between the private and the public spheres... The unhomely moment relates to the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence' (Homi Bhabha, quoted in Gunew, 2004: 95).²³ Literary theorist Ken Gelder and geographer Jane Jacobs also use the uncanny to blur the boundary between domestic and foreign. The two-way relationship between 'discourses of the sacred' in Australian Aboriginal and mainstream cultures – where 'sacredness and modernity solicit each other' – produces a 'condition for the nation we will designate as 'uncanny'' (Gelder and Jacobs, 1998: 22). Freud's essay, they argue, is not just about the psyche, but 'one's sense of place in a modern, changing environment, and it attends to anxieties which are symptomatic of an ongoing process of realignment in the post-war modern world' (ibid: 23). When one's home is rendered unfamiliar, one 'has the experience... of being in place and 'out of place' simultaneously'. But it is not simply the 'unfamiliar in itself which generates the anxiety of the uncanny', but 'specifically the combination of the familiar and the unfamiliar – the way the one seems always to inhabit the other' (ibid). They relate this to cultural theorist Julia Kristeva's belief that anxiety results when there is difficulty 'disentangling what is one's 'home' from what is not one's 'home' – what is 'foreign' or 'strange'' (ibid: 26).

Most of these interventions suggest the 'uncanny' as an unnerving sensation or state of being - as Kelley puts it, of 'horror tinged with confusion' (Kelley, 2004). But is this always the experience of living in a haunted house? What about the less extreme, more subtle, mixed, even positive responses? Do feelings, in any case, change over the course of living in such places? And do we know how to characterise what is 'familiar' as much as what is 'foreign' or 'strange'? Sociologist Elizabeth Shove, in her exploration of 'routinized and inconspicuous practices', bemoans the contemporary preoccupation with the 'explicit and visible and the dramatic' (Shove, 2003: 2). She asks: what about '*inconspicuous* consumption'? The '*unspectacular dimensions of daily life*', the conventions and habits linked to 'middle-range concepts' such as 'comfort, cleanliness and convenience', and the 'barely detectable gridlines of everyday life' (ibid: 2-3)?²⁴

²³ In a similar move, Kaika explores artist Rachel Whiteread's *House*, a full-scale cast of the interior of a terraced Victorian home scheduled for demolition in London's East End during 1993-4. The installation 'unsettles the boundaries between inside/outside, open/closed, and private/public space, thus producing an uncanny feeling in the viewer' (Kaika, 2005: 69).

²⁴ Shove also points out that what might constitute domestic 'normality' for some people might differ: 'Arrangements that are normal for some strike others as being extremely strange' (Shove, 2003: 2). Is what constitutes 'normality' in

This project, likewise, follows research which attends to ‘those fleeting ephemeral activities of little consequence that make up most of our daily lives and experiences, and within which the primary terms of existence of the voiceless, inarticulate and abject are often revealed’ (Buchli et al., 2004: 2-3).

It is worth reflecting how the so-called ‘ordinary’ experiences of home already defy expectations: ‘Apparently unhomely places may be experienced in homely ways, and... its counterpart – unhomely experiences of places normatively defined as home – are also possible’ (Blunt and Dowling, 2006: 121). This raises the further question: *which* types of home are uncanny? Do some homes have a greater potential to be haunted than others? For example, are these homes which people don’t own? The latter idea is assumed by some commentators. In 1987, the writer Peter Rogerson put the haunted council house down to a ‘lack of bonding between occupier and the property simply because... it belongs to someone else’ (in Taylor, 1998). Vidler took up the same theme, connecting the idea of the ‘unhomely’ to the ‘alienation of modern life’, a Marxist theory focusing on the ‘estrangement of the individual from his or her home which is the effect of renting property: ‘he finds himself in *someone else*’s house, in the house of a *stranger* who always watches him’’ (in Stewart, 2003: 95). Material culture theorist Daniel Miller repeats the same claim: the council estate is the prime site of feelings of ‘alienation’. People feel ‘haunted by the sense that their apartments belonged to the council – the state – and not to themselves’, leaving them feeling ‘stigmatized’ (Miller, 2001: 113). This theory seems to gain support from an unexpected direction. An online forum for public housing professionals contains a thread asking what to do when tenants make a homelessness application, claiming their home is haunted - ‘things flying off the wall, toys moving, spirit children’ (Shelter, 2002). Many contributors suggest tenants are trying to get re-housed. But some provide stories: ‘[I] did a few checks on [a] property and found that two previous tenants reported mysterious occurrences to the landlord... Since then the property has been demolished’. Another described sheltered housing having to be regularly blessed by the local vicar. The council set up a video at night to catch the culprit, which recorded the sound of the ‘front door bell being rung but no-one was on screen’. Another stated: ‘We get at least one of these a year in Walsall. Our usual approach is to arrange to carry out an exorcism! It usually does the trick’ (ibid). Despite these accounts, there is no evidence that council-owned homes are

a haunted home different to that of ‘ordinary’ homes? Do people living in haunted homes develop a different relationship to ‘normality’?

more haunted than others. The theory becomes a groundless, generalised cliché utilised to make wider political points, and downplays people's capacity to make 'home' in different ways. The theory is dismissed out of hand by Taylor: 'I come into contact with many cases of haunted houses. The archetypal haunted house may very well be a council house, and indeed many are, but by the same token many are not. These cases are not confined to any one social class or structure and there are common motifs in all' (Taylor, 1998).

The Im/material Geographies of Home

If the uncanny is, by some definitions, an experience involving ambiguous feelings, memories and effects, this project must attend to the 'immaterial' aspects of the domestic interior, fitting within the recent interest in the more ephemeral, ineffable, invisible, or discarded, aspects of places. The figure of the ghost is a symbol of the non-representational, something there but not there, immaterial yet having effect. But the relationship between the 'immaterial' and 'materiality' is complex, not least because of a maelstrom of conflicting theoretical positions. As geographer Loretta Lees points out, there is a tendency to 'use the material and immaterial as a shorthand for tensions between empirical and theoretical, applied and academic, concrete and abstract, reality and representation... objective and subjective, political economy and cultural studies, and so on' (Lees, 2002: 102).

We can distinguish two broad camps, the (re)materialists and those I refer to as 'new materialists'. The first camp heeded geographer Peter Jackson's call to 'rematerialise' social and cultural geography, for the discipline to be more 'grounded' in 'material realities' - by which they mix a focus on the 'real world' of solid matter with theories emphasising the importance of social and political relationships in forming this material world (Jackson, 2000: 10). Geographer Chris Philo argues, persuasively, that the discipline's new-found obsession with the immaterial has made it inattentive to the actual, everyday materiality of the places in which people actually dwell (Philo, 2000). But much of this work fixates on power relations, identity politics and economic transformation. Lees, for example, lauds urban geography for being 'firmly grounded in material culture or concern with socially significant differences' (Lees, 2002: 109).

From a different corner are those geographers who believe this approach sharpens a false divide between subject and object and text/language and matter. They describe an alternative vision, a materiality which *incorporates* the immaterial. Matthew Kearnes, for example, argues that a 'rematerialization of social and cultural geography' must account for the 'wayward expressiveness of matter' (Kearnes, 2003: 139); Alan Latham and Derek McCormack, that the material suggests the 'excessive potential of the immaterial' (Latham and McCormack, 2004: 710). They complain that the re-materialists' vision is of matter as universal, undifferentiated and inert, 'as somehow both obvious – as simply there – and as radically external – as in a concrete basis upon which all other activity is placed' (Kearnes, 2003: 148). Rather, matter should be seen as 'simultaneously – and unevenly – discursive and physical' (ibid, 150). They call for a broader concept of 'materiality' as something which contains the figurative, affective, discursive, physical and immaterial as part of a process of constantly-emerging relationships – excessive, expressive, wayward, unruly, and beyond themselves.²⁵

The ghost is already excessive for defying the laws of material causation and spatial scale: I am drawn to this sense of 'excess' in thinking about the materialities of the haunted home, especially how different kinds of matter 'co-exist, resonate or interfere' (Anderson and Wylie, forthcoming). Focusing on the process of co-existence or co-habitation means I don't have to assume that the uncanny events originate either in people's minds or in some 'immaterial', unknowable, force. But I part company with the new materialists because, firstly, despite their extended vision of materiality, theirs is a thoroughly *materialist* vision. They reinforce geographer Marcus Doel's assertion that: 'Nothing will be set aside from the play of force, nothing will be spirited away onto a higher plane or exorcised into a nether-world' (Doel, 2004: 151). They cannot allow the possibility for immateriality to include the ineffable which goes, or comes from, *beyond* the material, that cannot be fully explained by the world's physical processes, however dynamic and complex. Their 'excess' has its limits; it is too bounded because they don't allow for a different kind of boundary – between the material and immaterial as co-existing, overlapping, 'realities'.²⁶

²⁵ They argue that the immaterial is not in opposition to the material but gives the latter an 'expressive life' beyond the social. Concrete material is merely a 'particular aggregate organisation of process and energy'; matter is no more or less real than 'apparently 'immaterial' phenomena like emotion, mood, and affect ... held together and animated by processes that are excessive of form and position' (Latham and McCormack, 2004: 709).

²⁶ I'm not arguing that uncanny events are necessarily 'beyond' a material cause, or expect participants to believe this; but I want to allow for the possibility that not everything in the 'excessive' moment of an uncanny event can be incorporated into a materialist vision.

To reiterate an earlier argument, I also find it hard to think about 'home' without placing inhabitants central to it. The textual, discursive, material, figurative, and social might be part of the same relational plane, but it is only through our engagement with the social that we can speak of the others. We need to carve a path through 'materiality' without losing ourselves in the process. How do people deal with witnessing events which seem to be 'excessive' of reality as they know it? Do they try to 'contain' such excess? Even Latham and McCormack admit that theirs is a 'process' which 'involves capture and containment', the 'organisation of forces with a degree of consistency such that they are apprehensible as bodies, subjects, and objects'. If there is 'capture and containment' in the haunted home, it is likely to be a tactic of psychic survival, not just an academic exercise; we need to rethink materiality not only at the level of theory, but at the level of everyday encounter.

The Material Uncanny

Philo asserts that immaterial structures are 'cultural processes... in the sense of not being immediately available to human sensory apprehension' (Philo, 2000:31). But this seems simplistic. Uncanny events are likely to be experienced in *sensory* ways and to be imbricated within the physical fabric of the domestic interior – a symbiosis between the material and immaterial.²⁷ One way geographers have 'sought to understand the spectrality of space' is 'through the ghostly rendering of space, objects and embodiment' (Holloway and Kneale, 2008: 303). Pile's exploration of cities, for example, describes how 'various architectures of the city are haunted by multiple phantoms'; it is the 'very substance and the concreteness of the city and urban space which bring forth ghosts and haunting. As such the intertwining of the material with the immaterial registers a disruption or dislocation of the ordinariness of different spatialities' (ibid).

²⁷ The historical context of the relationship between the senses and supernatural has been explored. Writer Marina Warner describes how 'touch' was 'central' to the activities of psychic researchers, who 'wanted telepathic effects to be evident in the ways other than the visual: hence, the... phantasmal slaps and pinches, the gooey, smelly, haptic qualities of ectoplasm' (Warner, 2002).

How do uncanny events have a material impact on home and a sensory impact on inhabitants?²⁸ Some view the modern home as *already* and *ordinarily* uncanny because its material processes are unfixed and porous. Architect Karen Bermann describes the home as a ‘collection of opacities and transparencies, a theatre of appearance and disappearance in which we mask our presence or make it known. Every existing wall contradicts itself with openings, places where the obduracy of matter yields to the necessity of passage: joints and seals, points of rupture, of flow and failure, where water seeps in and air pours through, where materials meet and pull away. These gaps present us with opportunities to be seen and heard. Yet the exchange across the building’s porous envelope makes us vulnerable. One’s presence may be betrayed by a discarded orange peel, a bit of smoke, the sound of a toilet flushing or a pipe banging as water passes through. We are revealed through these traces, the things that architecture cannot keep, the separation that it cannot provide, its secretions, the excess that leaks through like light’ (Bermann, 1998: 169).²⁹ Kaika also focuses on the ‘simultaneous need and denial of socio-natural processes within the home’ as having an ambiguous, uncanny effect (Kaika, 2004: 266). During moments of crisis, the ‘networks, pipes and other material manifestations of the connections between ‘natural’ and ‘domestic’ spaces surface as ‘the domestic uncanny’; exploring this ‘uncanny materiality of “the other” in the form of the invisible metabolized nature or technology networks’ points at the ‘social construction of the separation between the natural and the social, the private and the public’ (ibid: 283).

Liminality

A focus on material space also allows for detailed exploration of particular, differentiated spaces within the home. How might people map their movements and feelings around their homes after experiencing uncanny events? The domestic interior tends to be positioned as a rather static space, *less* dynamic or complex than the ‘exterior’. Literary theorist Morag Shiach rightly reminds those fixated on public urban

²⁸ I use the phrase ‘uncanny event’ and also ‘experience’ for a witnessed anomaly; ‘event’ is neutral but dynamic, whilst ‘experience’ suggests something having human impact or involvement. Both words are non-specific enough to incorporate a wide range of reported phenomena and responses.

²⁹ Sound also travels *between* Victorian terraced homes; the thin brick walls provide little barrier. I think of this when I hear the old woman next door coughing in the night.

spaces they should consider the city as a 'network of rooms' (Shiach, 2005: 255). But her call for an engagement with the 'more confined, and the more *static* terrain of the room as a way of reading the modern city' (ibid, my italics) does not do the interior justice. We might, for example, describe the relationships between the more and less private and public spaces *within* the walls of home, and how people themselves differentiate between them. Does this help to navigate the haunting experience, to negotiate, for example, a sense of privacy? Does a successful co-habitation with ghosts depend on where ghosts are 'placed'?

According to writer Bob Trubshaw, there are three types of space: one-dimensional (pathways); two-dimensional (an area of land); and 'zero dimensional' (the concept of 'centre') (Trubshaw, 1995a): 'From Irish mythology to modern day Chinese language, there are 'five dimensions – north, south, east, west plus centre, the place where one is... Just as the 'Dreamtime' of the Australian aborigines is always and never, so the 'dream' or liminal place is everywhere and nowhere. This is the mythic time known in every nursery as 'Once upon a time'; or the Arabic equivalent 'It was and was not so'' (ibid). The complex nature of place is also reflected in the interplay between the fluidity and fixity of boundaries. This, in turn, is illustrated by folkloric beliefs describing ghosts as existing in a state in-between this world and the next (as described earlier), as well as being associated with *actual* places and times which mirror this liminal state: graveyards, moorland, twilight, the midnight hour. Within the home, these places are staircases, corridors, doorways, windows and chimneys: porous places of openings and exits in need of protecting as geomantic weakspots, passing places allowing passage from one point to another – neither 'here' nor 'there', public or private. The idea of liminality expresses the complexity of these spaces.

Objects, too, reflect and express people's responses to liminality. Taylor argues that people's attitude changes when told that a 'person had died in the chair which they were sitting in or the bed in which they slept' (Taylor, 1998). That chair or bed 'suddenly takes on a new meaning... it now takes on a liminal quality, it is a symbiotic link between the living and the dead'. He also describes Neolithic superstitions about doorways and death, such as 'screaming skulls', which 'occupy a specific space in the house' – usually around windows, above doors and in chimneys, used to 'keep away unwanted ghosts' (ibid). These 'archaic vestiges' persist, though 'greatly diluted'; they

are an 'important and deep-rooted aspect of modern culture in the form of those who believe their house is haunted' (ibid).³⁰

MEMORY

The idea of 'liminality' helps us examine different configurations of time as well as space. The uncanny is, as described, already associated with the intersection between memories, sensations and feelings. Commentators note how memory is central in shaping imaginative and material geographies of home (Blunt and Dowling, 2006: 198). Place memories are characterised as being tracked 'through the material residues' of a place, often in uncontained ways (DeSilvey, 2004: unpublished paper), and historical activity 'imprints itself and leaves material traces' (Radstone and Hodgkin, 2003b: 8). If, as described, the self is for some reflected in the objects of home, memories form a core part of this process. Geographer Divya Tolia-Kelly suggests the idea of 're-memory' in the context of British Asian home experiences, where multiple material and sensory surfaces are 'imbued' with memory. Re-memory 'is not an individual linear, biographical narrative,' but a 'conceptualization of encounters with memories, stimulated through scents, sounds and textures in the everyday... These are souvenirs from the traversed landscapes of the journey, signifiers of 'other' narrations of the past not directly experienced but which incorporate narrations of other's oral histories or social histories that are part of the diasporic community's re-memories' (Tolia-Kelly, 2004: 1).³¹

In a similar way, we might ask whether or not the material 'traces' left of a house's own past might not constitute a form of memory, suggesting the haunted home is a space of overlapping temporalities and agencies. How do people conceptualise or sense 'time' in the haunted home? Do uncanny events materially enact the presence of the past that characterises memory? How are ghosts seen to 'traverse' time? Like Tolia-Kelly's non-

³⁰ The Victorians also made a connection between home and death. A recurring image of heaven as a 'happy home' reinforced the idea of home as a 'stable and harmonious social environment in... this world and the next' (Hepworth, 1999: 18). Home was also 'the place where many people hoped to die', the 'appropriate place to confront and come to terms with the harsh realities of painful terminal illness and death; an essential link between the secular and the sacred' (ibid). Recent work has also described the tradition of 'laying out' a dead body at home (see Weber et al.: 1998).

³¹ Historian Antoinette Burton also points to the use of home as a trope in memory and history (Burton, 2003: 19). Memory – like women – has been represented as 'of dubious authority and reliability' (ibid: 210); but women's memories of home 'should count... as a constitutive, rather than just a supplemental, archive of the past' (ibid: 26).

linear and collective 're-memory', perhaps events are encounters with obscure memories *not* participants' own? Geographer Tim Edensor introduces a similar notion – 'fuzzy memories' – to describe ruins, 'an intersection of the visible and the invisible, the present and the past' (Edensor, 2001: 47). 'The energies and the activities of the people who made them, designed them, inhabited them, passed through them and decided to abandon them are now merely a residue. But there are half-known ideas, fuzzy memories and dreams and fantasies in the shreds and silent things that remain' (ibid).

Contemporary memory studies often focus on trauma, where negative experiences are repressed but not fully forgotten, centring on Freud's ambition for psychoanalysis to help patients 'remember and then work through traumatic occurrences from the past that continued to disturb them in the present' (Hoskins, 2003: 15).³² A common trope is to assume ghosts are similarly trapped in a 'reality which eludes grasping and assimilation', which is 'relived as haunting memory' in 'ceaseless repetitions and re-enactments' (Dawson, 2005: 168). Why else would they haunt? But is this how participants characterise their ghosts? A further assumption is often made: a tension between a home's past – as encapsulated in its material, visceral presence – and the physical changes people wish to impose to make it their 'own'. Ghosts play a pivotal role in such a drama; they are assumed, as described, to be previous inhabitants. For Miller, there is a 'discrepancy' between the 'longevity of homes and the relative transience of their occupants' (Miller, 2001: 107). Miller feels 'haunted' and inhibited by his home's 'original aesthetic' and that inherited from the previous owner. He feels 'intimidated' and 'somehow being let down' by the 'material environment within which one presents oneself to oneself and to the world at large' (ibid: 110-111). The haunted house genre is a 'mythic form' that 'constructs a resolution' to this 'problem of social and material relations' (ibid). Coming to terms with the 'agency' expressed in the temporality of the home and its material culture is, he claims, about 'developing a larger cosmology of authenticity, truth, negotiation and identity' (ibid). This account suggests homes are perceived to be tainted for being lived in previously by others. A desire to

³² In his essay 'Totem and Taboo' (Freud, 2001b) Freud suggests that the development of ghost belief describes conflicting relationships with dead family members. If participants believe they are haunted by relatives, does this change their response? Cultural theorist Marianne Hirsch's idea of 'postmemory' also describes the transmission of trauma, a process involving the 'embodiment of pathology in individuals through the unconscious absorption of family narratives, and... the unspoken transmission of the parents' unconscious to the child' (Brogan, 1998: 19). Perhaps memory transmission works in a similar way in the haunted home, but passed through strangers sharing the same home over time? Do the 'memories' passed need to be traumatic?

uncover a house's history suggests an alternative sense of pleasure in its past for some people, such as the writer Julie Myerson (Myerson, 2005). But is knowledge of its past only enjoyable in a home that isn't haunted? And do haunted homes always have to have a 'history'? Can new houses be haunted?

Memory's place in culture has been defined by an 'extraordinarily complex, discursive web of ritual and mythic, historical, political and psychological factors' (Hyssen, 1994: 9). The intricate relationships between witnessing, remembering and forgetting have been the subject of debate, focused in particular on the Holocaust. The belief that memory 'relates less to a notion of a preserved and permanent sense of the past' has fuelled debate about what 'can and should be' remembered (Hoskins, 2003: 10). One move is to complicate a trope in cultural criticism which suggests that 'enlightened modernization liberates us from traditions and superstitions, that modernity and the past are inherently antagonistic to each other' (ibid).³³ An attendant move, by post-Holocaust artists, has been to emphasise the importance of the afterlife of events. In particular, multi-media devices are seen as offering leeway to negotiate the 'transaction between fact and imagination' (Langer, 2002: 78), working within 'that fringe zone between the inability to describe and the impossibility of knowing' (ibid: 83). Such art becomes 'memory of the witnesses' memory, a vicarious past... the next generation ensures that their 'post-memory' of events remains an unfinished, ephemeral process, not a means toward definitive answers to impossible questions' (Young, 2000: 2). History becomes a 'composite' record of both events themselves and their transmission to the next generation. This approach, theorist James Young argues, risks appearing 'evasive, self-indulgent' and too absorbed in the 'vicarious experiences' of memory. But it does suggest how the Holocaust is a 'necessarily mediated experience, the afterlife of memory, represented in history's afterimages' (ibid). Memory, thus, according to film theorist Annette Kuhn, does not 'simply involve forgetting, misremembering, repression – that would be to suggest there is some fixed 'truth' of past events: memory actually is these processes, it is always already secondary revision' (Kuhn, 2002: 157-158). The focus on the ephemeral nature of post-event memories is relevant for examining the vicarious nature of ungraspable uncanny events for witnesses, experiences hard to represent and 'capture' in the first place. Is it possible to track the ways people

³³ Memory theorist Pierre Nora and others, for example, have criticized postmodernism for a loss of a sense of the past, taking a bleak view of the 'simulacra' promoted by postmodernist 'hyperconsumerism' and rush into the future, and poststructuralism's 'floating signifiers' and 'irreverence for authority' (Walsh, 1992: 57). See also Legg, 2005, for more on Nora.

anticipate, remember or forget such events? How does this impact on the way they inhabit their homes?

The Social Life of Ghost Stories

The relationship between memory and materiality is often given meaning within a wider social context. Do different householders within the same home, for example, experience or interpret uncanny events the same way? Do they influence each other and 'jog' each others' memory? How far do narratives become established and take on a life of their own over repeated telling? How far, in turn, are these influenced by wider social narratives? Cultural historian Graham Dawson, in his study of the Irish Troubles, explores how war memories develop from informal networks. People who have undergone similar experience exchange personal stories and shared memories which 'circulate' within relatively 'private social arenas' with recognition remaining 'restricted and contained within the group itself'. In order to secure public recognition, they must create agencies capable of 'recasting its narratives into a new, integrated collective form and project this into a 'public arena' where it speaks to others beyond the immediate circle of memory' (Dawson, 2005: 151). Dawson's focus is on examining the imaginative 'meanings and associations that are attached to a place through storytelling or practices of remembrance' which enable a 'community of people to orient themselves within and inhabit that place' (ibid). People 'pool their stories, help each other to fill out the gaps and silences in their own recollections, and endeavour to piece together a more complete and adequate narrative of the truths behind the traumatic events' (ibid: 169). This approach is more optimistic than Kuhn's, for whom there is no fixed 'truth' of the past (Kuhn, 2002). Here, people attempt to 'piece together' a narrative of the event which is 'adequate' to its (plural) 'truths'.

Dawson's work suggests how memory and narrative inform experience and ideas about place. How far do ghost stories circulate to 'create' or reinforce the idea of a home as haunted? How far is this process shared within households, networks of family or friends? How far does it originate or circulate within local neighbourhoods? Tracing the social life of stories – the way they are circulated and reproduced, retold, passed on – might help to understand people's relationship to the after-event of experience. Ghost story-telling, in particular, might be a strategy for containing an open-ended experience,

as Gelder describes: 'People who had heard that I was compiling this anthology [of ghost stories] doubted if there were any Australian ghost stories to be found,' he recalled. 'At the same time, they almost invariably knew someone who used to tell ghost stories, recalling late evenings spent listening to them – and then continuing to listen after they were finished, because ghost stories, even when they draw to a close, never do completely lay themselves to rest. They always spill over their own boundaries; listeners may realise that they are affected more than they might wish to be; they may not altogether 'believe', but – and this is where a certain kind of (usually pleasurable) anxiety arises – they cannot altogether afford not to' (Gelder, 1994: ix).

Sociologist Gillian Bennett describes how the wayward ghost narrative has been tidied up through a 'literaryfying' process (Bennett, 1999: 193). Folk collectors, as suggested, felt no onus to take tales seriously or repeat them accurately. They 'rounded them off' into narrative style, thus perpetuating clichés: the 'printed stories which tend to survive may parody the informal, oral tales they were based on' (ibid).³⁴ And the tendency continues for hearers to 'ask questions and suggest details and generally try to get it into better shape as a ghost story' (Bennett, 2004).

The ability for ghost stories to defy completion and resolution has led to their use as forms of resistance. Literary theorist Kathleen Brogan has explored, for example, how fictional Afro-American ghost stories – 'tacit, multiple, conflicting, or unfinished' – create and maintain ethnic identity: 'The creation of narrative is central to the process of reshaping the past... The focus on storytelling shifts emphasis away from biological to adoptive models of cultural transmission... Lineage is established through rivers of words; the oral transmission of group history and lore itself creates the group, rather than being merely its by-product. Families do not simply tell stories; stories create families. Descent is reinterpreted as verbal or, in the metaphorical language of the genre, as ghostly. The transmission of stories – and most emphatically of ghost stories –

³⁴ Modern-day versions of this process can be seen in popular ghost stories repackaged by place marketers, as described. Absurdly, in 2002, the city of York claimed to have more ghosts than its main rival, Edinburgh (504 to 60). A study of Scottish tourism suggests: 'A ghostly past clearly is felt to sell' (Inglis and Holmes, 2003: 51). The places ghosts 'live out their spectral non-lives are constructed as being authentic through the very presence of the ghost, which operates as a hallmark of the archaic nature of the locale in question' (ibid). Television's slavish adherence to formula also reinforces popular narratives. I was contacted by a producer working on a series on haunted homes, who suggested a swap of 'rejects'. The programme format required people had a dramatic, negative reaction to ghosts. A medium would expel them, re-establishing happy family life – 'resolution': order and normality restored. Most people had a far more ambivalent relationship than the programme makers wanted.

creates ethnicity. Historical meaning and ethnic identity are established through the process of haunting' (Brogan, 1998: 18).

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ambiguous ghost stories might have helped crystallise debates focused around binaries such as nature and the supernatural, faith and doubt, religion and science, reason and unreason, and conscious and unconscious; perhaps, as Miller (2001) might suggest, the stories attempted to resolve such tensions. But many women writers at the time had a different mission: to explore the relationship between women and home within patriarchy. Their ghosts were markedly less frightening than Marcus' (1999) intrusive strangers, sympathetically reflecting women's domestic role: 'Horror and terror are rarely the most appropriate responses to such visitations. Instead, women characters realize their commonality with the ghostly women and children they encounter and are often called upon to understand and act upon the messages brought by those who haunt their houses. Often, these messages warn of the dangers of domesticity' (Carpenter and Kolmar, 1991: 14).

These stories emerged out of a folk tradition in the UK which was generally disparaged as irrational, female, and emotional.³⁵ Back in 1725, Henry Bourne dismissed tales of haunted houses as the 'legendary stories of nurses and old women' (in Bennett, 1999: 177). Such an attitude, Bennett argues, is a sure indication of the 'existence of a genuine folklore'. Many people (including the 'educated') continued to believe in ghosts – despite the number of cultural forces vying against this. But, as noted, in the face of the eighteenth century's 'overpowering confidence that nature was subdued and irrational fears abolished', where 'science and rationalism created a world in man's image and there was no longer a place for magic and mystery', it is not surprising that 'belief in the supernatural should go underground' (ibid: 176-177). People chose instead 'unofficial channels' – 'informal opinion expressed through the medium of a network of face-to-face conversations' between friends and family. How far do such stories and ideas continue to circulate locally and informally?

³⁵ During the early twentieth century, women were perceived as more suggestible than men, and those considered inferior and weaker were assumed more likely to succumb to social influence (see Blackman and Walkerdine, 2001). I was surprised to read these same ideas persisting into the 1970s: 'Remember that more women see ghosts than men... This may be due to the fact that... women have more vivid imaginations; or (perhaps an old-fashioned suggestion) that they are more emotional than men and are therefore endowed with a lesser degree of logic' (Green, 1973: 106). And, elsewhere: 'It is helpful to know that blacks, widows, women and people with a conviction... are more likely to have contact with the dead, but it is astonishing, perhaps a little unnerving, to know that more than one-quarter of the American population has had such experiences' (Greeley, 1975: 43).

The Ghost as Metaphor or Social Figure

This project has been undertaken during an apex of interest in ghosts in cultural, literary and social theory. Many academic interventions focus on ghosts as fictions conjured in the social imagination, as 'resistors' of modernity, or as social figures pointing at inequalities and the 'presence' of absence.³⁶ Philosophers Karl Marx and Jacques Derrida have been mined for their concern with material conditions 'while problematising direct oppositions between the material and the immaterial' (Spearey, 2000: 171). The act of summoning the spectre 'serves to unsettle notions of presence, thereby forcing the witness to acknowledge that which has been excluded or repressed from the here-and-now in the process of rendering the present both comprehensible and habitable' (ibid). Social theorist Avery Gordon draws on Derrida's deconstruction methodology, he called a 'hauntology', a theory of ghosts. The self is a 'ghost in the sense that it is never fully present to itself. The ghost also haunts texts, standing for meanings that have been repressed or denied; but because the attempt to fix meaning is doomed to fail, the ghost is always present. The presence of ghosts, then, reminds us that such a project fails to see everything; and what it does not see – as well as the act of not-seeing itself – constitute social injustice' (Gordon, 1997: 12). In a similar vein, sociologist Kevin Hetherington describes the haunted house as 'just a figure of speech for any number of ruined spaces... We find it wherever 'the dead' are not fully disposed of; where they remain unburied... We find the ghost within the materiality of social life; a repository of overlooked social relations, outmoded utopian wishes and half forgotten memories now discarded... in the fractured panoramas and consumer abundance of the capitalist city' (Hetherington, 2001: 2).

Cultural theorist Janna Jones manages to slip a 'real' ghost into her discussion of the presences and absences filling an old cinema in Florida. The ghost, former projectionist 'Fink', is a 'metaphor for the elusive character of popular memory' (Jones, 2001: 370). Jones distinguishes between the theatre's 'official past' and its missing aspects: a

³⁶ Warner also argues for ghosts as metaphors: 'Unseen phenomena – spirits... shades of the dead... have been visualized and communicated so effectively that the conventions they rely on and adopt have themselves become invisible. The metaphors that enfold them introduce them into reality. But that reality can be expressed only through metaphor' (Warner, 2006: 10).

history of 'racial' segregation, the African American community's help in saving the cinema, its unsung technicians. Absences 'can and do leave traces' (ibid: 377). Fink's appearance as a ghost illuminates how 'seemingly invisible memories not only fill the theatre but also disrupt the nostalgic calm that permeates its space' (ibid: 374).

Philosopher Douglas Kellner describes the symbolism of Tobe Hooper's film, *Poltergeist*, where a property development is built on top of a graveyard, the corpses left under the ground – part of a wave of cult horror films in the early 1980s. The film explores the 'environment and lifestyle of the new affluent, suburban middle class and presents symbolic projections of its insecurities and fears', at a time of economic instability (Kellner, 1995: 127). These fears include the destruction of the family and anxieties about 'losing one's home, or watching it fall apart' (ibid: 131). There are racial and class overtones too. Goodness 'resides in middle-class familial normality and Otherness resides in the working-class or racial Others' (ibid).³⁷

The figure of the ghost is also used as a metaphor for freedom and oppression. Literary theorist Sneja Gunew points to Judith Butler's discussion of the abject as 'those "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject' (Gunew, 2004: 95). In a similar move, photographer Roshini Kempadoo uses the idea of 'ghosting' to produce photography which plays with notions of absence in the racialized Caribbean landscape (Kempadoo, 2004). You-Me Park utilises Derrida in relation to minority women's writings, which have 'relied heavily on the figure of ghosts in their critique of social structures that normalise and privilege a certain sector at the expense of making others invisible and silencing them... being a ghost is the only mode of being that allows them to resist those definitions and explore multiple meanings and alternative modes of existence' (Park, 2000: 164). But the 'promise of liberation... is a double-edged one, as ghosts only gain access to their autonomy and power after they are eliminated from material sites of life' (ibid: 165).

Lastly, geographer Cheryl McEwan appraises how 'modernities are enchanted in particular places and [for] political effect' (McEwan, 2008: 29). She utilises Jane Bennett's (2001) call for 're-enchantment' as a 'political end' in terms of a 'more

³⁷ There are numerous other examples of this approach. The writer W G Sebald's cryptic use of photography within his texts is often explored as presence granted to absent memories and discarded objects. See Wylie, 2007.

profound dialogue between Western social theory and 'Other' knowledges in fostering an ethical engagement with the world and as a means of building a new politics of solidarity' (ibid: 30). McEwan questions Bennett's optimistic reliance on the 'largely positive workings of enchantment, on charm, awe, wonder, and a childlike excitement about life'; she argues that enchantment 'encompasses a much wider range of emotions and affects' (ibid). Conditions of postcoloniality in South Africa have 'produced very particular forms of enchantment (including ghosts and other spectral presences) that are also deeply politicised responses to change' (ibid: 30-31). Ghosts create negative experiences, symbolic of wider social dynamics. But there is also the potential for people to 'assert [their] subjectship as a means of resisting and even transgressing relationships of power' (ibid: 41).

Approaching the Ghost Differently

The above discussion illustrates the plethora of recent interventions which involve the ghost as a social figure or metaphor. This work offers useful contextual markers to help understand the impact of wider social and cultural forces on participants' responses. It suggests creative possibilities for the way uncanny events might be described metaphorically or symbolically. But the approach is too limited, starting from a political premise, not interested in the spectral in itself, rather as a means of illustrating wider arguments which have often been settled from the start. In the example above, McEwan describes how 'conditions of postcoloniality' in a post-Apartheid situation have 'produced very particular forms of enchantment (including ghosts and other spectral presences) that are also deeply politicised responses to change' (McEwan, 2008: 30-31). Clearly, it is not the ghosts and spectral presences themselves that are responding in such 'deeply politicised' ways. The phrasing gains a dramatic frisson from this pretence: the subtext is collusion with her academic audience in knowing this. There is a widely-held, unspoken assumption that the supernatural is not a 'reality' and therefore could not be a subject for social analysis. Introducing a book on the gothic, literary theorist David Punter states: 'By referring in the book's subtitle to a 'Gothic geography', we are, of course, speaking as always in a metaphor' (Punter, 1999: 4). Unimpressed, geographer David Matless rightly responds: 'The metaphor allows productive exploration of Gothic's limits of mappability, but the phrase 'of course' jars... Speaking 'as always' in a metaphor becomes speaking only in a metaphor, bypassing more complex possibilities of cultural geography' (Matless, 2008: 338).

To develop Matless's point, much research avoids the challenge of exploring the visceral and cognitive impact of encountering the ghost in the more prosaic, mundane round of everyday life. Theorists could be accused of reworking relationships of power that they assume they are exposing. The ghost can't speak back, and is further silenced by becoming a symbol for something else, a trope within cultural theory. People who grapple with uncanny experiences are therefore also silenced, and this misses a potentially rich vein of insight into their lives.

Literary theorist Roger Luckhurst raises a similar point in a discussion of the recent gothic turn in London fictions, arguing that this take does not allow for the specificity of place. The 'critical language of spectral or haunted modernity that has become a cultural-critical shorthand in the wake of [Derrida's] *Specters of Marx* can go only so far in elaborating the contexts for that specific topography of this London Gothic – that, indeed, the generalized structure of haunting is symptomatically blind to its generative loci' (Luckhurst, 2002a: 528). The 'hauntological frameworks' encouraged by Derrida's work 'routinize specificity beneath a general discourse regarding the spooky 'secret sharer' of Enlightenment modernity. This is a curious product of a thinker so often insistent on singularity and a resistant residue of untranslatability in every event' (ibid: 541). He concludes: 'Perhaps, then, it is worth recalling that ghosts are held to haunt specific locales, are tied to what late Victorian psychical researchers rather splendidly termed 'phantasmogenetic centres'... The spectral turn reaches a limit if all it can describe is a repeated structure or generalized 'spectral process' – perhaps most particularly when critics suggest the breaching of limits is itself somehow inherently political' (ibid: 541-542).

The use of metaphor is a way of maintaining credence within the 'rational' academy whilst gaining currency by dabbling in its fringes. The focus by some on ghosts, hauntings, ruins and psychogeographies, suggests a deeply romantic desire to go beyond what is apparent and (apparently) banal. As McEwan (2008) suggests, attendant moves to re-animate or re-enchant life have tended towards optimism. It is a focus which basks too quickly in its potency as political resistance. At worst, by utilising the same limited theoretical tools, this body of work repeats itself, and will in time require a different route. The one I offer here is a pause at the event itself and its aftermath. It is to allow voice to the witnesses, to ask how they *themselves* might describe, explain, negotiate such experience, and to extrapolate with caution from this point. We might even, as

described, allow the ghost, and the home, their own oblique presence, allow the more imponderable forces space to be, even if they can't speak and won't be interviewed. Such an approach does not ignore wider influences, as if the uncanny event was somehow separate from them. As described, I am interested in the ways in which cultural processes and social relationships are imbricated, exposed, enhanced, through such experience. But the point is not to put the theoretical cart before the horse, which requires that the event gets collapsed, its different and complex significance subsumed by a totalising need to impose a particular set of imperatives. The trick is to find a way to do this without romanticising events, taking them at 'face value', or reifying the places in which they occur. It is to work creatively with our cultural assumptions without blindly reiterating them. Luckhurst, for example, describes the aim of a study of telepathy as writing 'a history... that does not prejudge', complaining that a 'number of impressive histories of psychical research... have either been written from invested positions or start from the assumption that psychical research was a mad pursuit, a late efflorescence of the Victorian crisis of faith' (Luckhurst, 2002b: 1-2).

It is ironic that the figure of the ghost should be raised to help uncover injustice, given the continuing influence of the anti-superstitious Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx, who attempted to 'uncover hidden psychological, economic and other structures and meanings that help them to interpret and explain much of overt religious experience' (Allen, 1998: 37). Famously, Marx asserted that people 'create religious illusions by projecting all that is positive and lacking in this alienated world onto some imaginary, unreal, supernatural world... The clear message is that rational, unalienated human beings will free themselves from religious illusion and address the real causes of the exploitation and injustice that afflict humankind' (ibid).

Many anthropological and geographical interventions also explain away belief in relation to wider processes. Anthropologist Aihwa Ong, for example, describes how Malay women factory workers are sometimes seized by 'spirit possession' (Ong, 1987). She accepts Clifford Geertz's assertion of a need to read meanings 'from the native's point of view' (ibid: 2), but argues for an analysis focusing on work discipline and power relations within the wider context of the transition from peasant society to industrial production. She imposes this analytical framework upon sparse empirical information. Elsewhere, an edited collection, *Mapping the Sacred*, focuses on sacred space, using a dialectical approach which refuses to 'reduce either environmental or

religious considerations to the determinative influence of the other' (Scott and Simpson-Housley, 2001: xxiii). But the focus is, again, on 'economic, social and political realities defining representations of sacred space' which 'often constitute important sites of... geographies of resistance' (ibid).

To take an alternative approach, do we have to accept uncritically people's belief in the supernatural? Geographer Paul Harrison, contributing to an online discussion, states the problem thus: 'Most of what passes for the 'geographies of religion' seem to be identity politics by another name, where the fact that these are putatively religious or spiritual phenomena makes little or no difference to their study... Is it possible within the epistemological and methodological terms of social science to actually study such phenomena as religious experience without explaining it away as ideology or identity, or are the two 'language games' completely antithetical to each other?' (Harrison, 2004).

This challenge has, perhaps, yet to be fully taken up, but there is an acknowledgement of its importance. Even the Derridean bent of the editors of a special journal issue on the spectral surprisingly concede a 'need to move beyond the use of spectres as just narrative, metaphorical or allegorical devices' (Maddern and Adey, 2008: 292). But in order to go further than proclamations and statements of intent, we are challenged to find an approach which steers a course somewhere between, on the one hand, an uncritical exploration of beliefs, and on the other, explaining them away by recourse to the wider social and cultural contexts. Geographer Anne Buttimer puts it like this: 'To deny reality to phenomena that appear to be beyond the reach of currently available analytical methods smacks of naïve empiricism... it is surely credible and analytically defensible to claim that religion and belief systems have been socially constructed; it is quite another matter to claim that there is "nothing but" socially constructed discourses to religion' (Buttimer, 2006: 198). In the same issue, Holloway calls for a nonreductionist approach to 'spaces of the religious, spiritual, or the sacred', suggesting a 'middle ground' which doesn't reduce causes to ideology or social relations (Holloway, 2006: 186).

How to deal critically with beliefs continues to tax geographers of religion, who focus on reductionism versus non-reductionism, on how to deal with phenomenological issues around subjectivity and objectivity in relation to religious experience, on positional

issues concerning researchers who are religious ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’, and on the question of whether the ‘politics’ or the ‘poetics’ of religion should prevail. Michael Ferber, for example, discusses the work of leading geographer of religion Lily Kong, examining the fear that ‘through reductionism the sacred will be eliminated completely and replaced by political, economic, and social explanation’ (Ferber, 2006: 178). He explains: ‘Kong recognizes that many social constructivist studies analyze how ‘politics shape poetics’ whereas studies on the poetics of the sacred tend to ignore politics, an act she attributes to romanticization. Also relevant in this absence is the idea that politics, economies, and cultures can be studied in a significantly more objective manner than the sacred, allowing social constructivist conclusions to be applied to the poetics of religion but rarely permitting a parallel flow in the opposite direction’ (ibid).

Anthropologists also grapple with how to approach traditional non-Western rituals. Most interesting is anthropologist Isabelle Nabokov’s ethnography of Tamil rituals (Nabokov, 2000: 7): ‘The movement of this book is... from intimate to collective ‘crossings’ by human beings over to the supernatural world and back. Because each one of these ‘crossings’ is replete with highly specific and deeply personalized meanings, I present them from the perspective of individual experiences’ (ibid: 17). But she struggles with how to impose a wider framework to ‘place’ such experiences. Applying Western psychological models onto Indian religion is problematic because such readings ‘seem too simplistic, reductionist, and rationalist’ (ibid: 27). They tend to ‘affect the interpretation of religious experiences’, which are ‘presumed to free the self from repressed memories, childhood traumas, and whatever else inhibits its adjustment’ (ibid: 28). Her tactic is to avoid theorising the experiences too much, offering a mainly descriptive – perhaps too descriptive – commentary.

To attempt a ‘middle ground’ might certainly be to forego the right, as theorists, to make certain claims. The writer Paul Devereux describes seeing a ghostly van (with no driver) early one morning on the M6. The sighting exemplified ‘reports that purported to be *actual experiences*: it was still folklore, but it was *our* folklore and it was being presented as real encounters by people from the beginning of the early modern era to the present time. My M6 experience had taught me that we still inhabited a haunted land’ (Devereux, 2001: 141). He ruminates on the ‘conflicting conclusions’ of an earlier study on the ‘phantom hitch-hiker’ phenomenon; this is ‘undoubtedly [contemporary] folklore’, yet it is ‘sprinkled with some incidents that adhere to the theme of the legend

yet which appear to be authentic happenings' (ibid: 149). 'This half-folklore, half-incident ambiguity I was to gradually learn was a characteristic of a good many types of haunting' (ibid).

The issue of 'liminality' also becomes a *leitmotif* for this conundrum. If I find that, according to participants, ghosts *do* inhabit 'liminal' places, this might suggest continuing relationships between folkloric belief, place and 'experience', leading to the overlooked question: 'Why do some things stay the same?' But the mechanisms are likely to elude me. I don't want to reduce the experience down to any one explanation: my analysis has to stop short at a certain point.

Contesting Knowledge, Embracing Uncertainty

I might be more able to find the 'middle ground' when investigating participants' anomalous experience because it is already a highly contested arena. The philosopher Michael Philips describes how supernatural experience has historically posed a threat to materialism, which 'asserts that everything is or can be explained in relation to matter. This would be straightforward enough if we had a clear and stable idea of matter. But do we? Unfortunately, we don't... The laws of physics get stranger every day' (Philips, 2003: 18). Rather than looking for a 'clear and stable concept of matter', he adds, it might be better to think about 'all those spooky, ephemeral and esoteric things that materialism denies... Over the years, the targets have expanded. The main target of seventeenth-century materialism was Descartes' mental substance. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century materialism was more ambitious, attacking both the supernatural in general (eg ghosts and magic) and religion in particular... The main targets of twentieth century materialism expanded still further to include consciousness. These targets are very different but they have one important thing in common. In one way or another, they all challenge the idea that science is capable of producing a complete causal account of the universe' (ibid).³⁸

³⁸ Some scientists themselves question 'reason'. Neuroscientist Chris Frith argues that 'conscious reasoning is an attempt to justify a decision after it's made' (Frith, 2008: 45), and mathematician Roger Penrose describes how quantum mechanics is used 'to pick holes in reason' (Penrose, 2008: 49).

The possibility of events defying materialist explanation allows rationalism to come under critical scrutiny. In their psychoanalytical account of ghosts, literary theorists Peter Buse and Andrew Stott 'set up their project as moving beyond histories of a neglected 'outside of reason' (the occult, spiritualism etc), instead seeking 'to inspect the inside of reason and see how it too is haunted by what it excludes' (Matless, 2008: 337). For others, the project is to 'extend' rationality – but not to replace it: 'Something happens that wrenches norms and expectations out of joint, and discourse follows in its wake, trying to turn the inconceivable into meaningful narrative form. [These] have come to stand as limit-cases or challenges to materialist explanation. They do not mark the abolition of meaning or comprehension, though, but are points of pressure that have compelled a rethinking or extension of knowledge formations' (Luckhurst, website, 2004).

The apparent opposition between mainstream and alternative knowledge has been read politically, including the gendering, as described, of the emotion and reason binary.³⁹ Kuhn points to an 'opposition between dominant (middle-class, male, white) ways of knowing on the one hand, and 'knowledge from below', on the other'. Knowledge from below, or 'common knowledge', is 'often dismissed as superstition, 'female intuition', 'old wives' tales'; or at best patronised as 'folklore', the quaintly earthly wisdom of the unlettered. Looked at from a different standpoint, though, it can be seen as the knowledge of those who understand that the world does not belong to them, but who see themselves as belonging to the world: indigenous peoples and peasants. To the extent that they inherit or share it, it is also the knowledge of the working classes of industrial societies, especially of the women among them' (Kuhn, 2002: 120).

Whilst there is a danger that Kuhn's (2002) holders of 'common knowledge' may be romanticised, there is a question of where to demarcate the line between what accounts for the 'mainstream' and 'alternative', and what's at stake in reinforcing such a divide.⁴⁰

³⁹ Emotion has been 'viewed as 'beneath' the faculties of thought and reason' (Ahmed, 2004:3). 'To be emotional is to have one's judgement affected: it is to be reactive rather than active, dependent rather than autonomous... Emotions are associated with women, who are represented as 'closer' to nature... less able to transcend the body through thought, will and judgement'. But Bondi warns that the introduction of 'emotion' into the 'vocabulary of geographical scholarship' does not necessarily 'challenge dominant ideas about what constitutes knowledge' (Bondi, 2005: 1).

⁴⁰ It is, perhaps, telling that *women* ghost story writers, into the early twentieth century, were 'more likely to portray natural and supernatural experience along a continuum', where boundaries between the two were 'not absolute but fluid, so that the supernatural can be accepted, connected with, reclaimed, and can often possess a quality of familiarity' (Carpenter and Kolmar, 1991: 12).

One antagonism has been between official, institutional religion and alternative beliefs. From the early eighteenth-century, 'descriptions of divergent religions appear to imply that "the others" hold all folk beliefs, supernatural beliefs or new religious ideas. Such beliefs are seen as being in opposition to the "right" religion, as well as to enlightenment and rationality. Throughout the centuries the religious community has kept appropriating new arguments for designating correct and true beliefs... The concept and idea of superstition and divergent beliefs are still in use. Yet there is no agreement... about the meaning of the word, or about how to assess superstitious beliefs' (Selberg, website, 2003).

Religious studies researcher Marion Bowman argues that in order to understand religion, it is 'necessary to understand the relationship between official, folk and individual beliefs and practices' (Bowman, 2004: 5). To this end, I am interested to find out the role of different kinds of belief in the experience of uncanny events; how beliefs might even be *changed* through experience. Attending to participants' positions on cultural, religious, supernatural and folkloric beliefs might provide insights into the overlaps between these different formal and informal 'systems'.

Researchers Gillian Bennett and Kate Bennett describe how people who experience the supernatural tend to choose between two interpretations: the 'materialist' and the 'supernaturalist', but suggest it is the *social context* which dictates which they adopt: 'Experiencers have access to rival cultural traditions to help interpret what has occurred... their choice may vary between one occasion and another, or sometimes between one sentence and another. Both discourses are familiar and ready to hand as interpretive and conversational tools but, although the supernaturalist tradition allows people to assert the reality of their experiences, they are reluctant to espouse it openly... for fear of ridicule. Especially with strangers, or in the context of a scientific survey, they may prefer to opt into the materialist discourse and describe their experiences in the language of illusion... [which] they know will be safest and most acceptable' (Bennett and Bennett, 2000: 154-155).⁴¹

Do people really slip between opposing interpretations from '*one sentence to the next*'? Might people's ideas oscillate anyway, not just in response to audience but because of

⁴¹ Gillian Bennett has developed a sociological area of research called 'Contemporary Legend', the textual analysis of urban myths (Bennett and Smith, 1996).

difficulty in arriving at a firm position? The Bennetts' analysis does suggest people might feel self-conscious acknowledging belief in the supernatural – given the 'materialist discourse' is deemed the 'norm'. But what counts as 'knowledge' for people? How do people steer between different paradigms? Is rationalism challenged in the face of uncanny experience or upheld despite of it?

Interesting also is the assumption that the choice of 'available explanatory discourses' is limited to these two opposite poles. Unsurprisingly, research itself has tended to polarise, with little serious study which doesn't take an *a priori* position – that ghosts exist, or, more often within the academy, that they do not. A belief in the supernatural tends to be positioned in opposition to 'modernity': 'Our perspective on modernity and religion is that they are perceived as two incompatible phenomena, while modernity and secularisation are considered two aspects of the same process. In this context, religion belongs to traditional society' (Selberg, 2003). But Pile cautions against considering ghosts a 'pre-modern' phenomenon. Exploring traditional rituals to 'appease ghosts' in Singapore, he states: 'Such beliefs... do not simply co-exist with modernity, nor are they some kind of vestigial pre-modern superstition that will somehow disappear in the modern city; they are part of what it means for Singapore to be modern... Singapore is not alone in this – such experiences with ghosts expose the ghostly figures that parade through the phantasmagorias of modern city life. The hauntedness of modernity itself... Far from ghosts representing a drag on progress, I would argue that haunting lies at the heart and soul of modernity' (Pile, 2005: 134-136).

Behind competing ideas about modernity, belief and knowledge lies the uncertainty of the witnessed experience itself. The obscure cause of uncanny events, lack of obvious, communicable *raison d'être*, the disruption of material cause-effect relations: uncanny events remain radically uncertain and open to multiple interpretations. Their uncanny effects might elude categorisation and exceed the 'agents of reason' (Bennett and Royle, 1995: 39), but perhaps they also stand symbolically for attempts to describe, analyse and 'fix' experience itself. How do people 'test out' their experiences? How do they attempt to claim 'authenticity'?⁴² The realm of sensory experience demands that we sit with rational explanation's limits. For Lacan, Levinas and others, accepting

⁴² Wiseman admits that hauntings have been reported by 'a large number of seemingly trustworthy witnesses' (Wiseman et al., 2003: 195). Radin also notes: 'One challenge to prematurely banishing the apparition is the observation that ghosts appear often enough to reasonably sane, well-educated, well-adjusted individuals to sustain ghost legends even among persons who would not readily admit interest in such things' (Radin, 2001: 165).

‘unknowability’ is a moral position because it resists ‘acts of colonisation and reduction of the other to the same... It is not what is in the message that is important, but what is *transmitted* by it, however untranslatable that may turn out to be’ (Frosh, 2008). For Holloway and Kneale, ghosts are uncertain in their very nature. There is ‘always an excess to the ghost and the spaces they haunt’, they explain. ‘Spectrality and haunting is impossible to exorcise through the securing categories that have often been created for them. Ghosts and spectres appear and disappear, are both absent and present. They are incarnations which hover between secure accounting mechanisms... Inexplicability means that spectral geographies always produce and are produced through a degree of hesitancy. As such, haunted spaces and ghostly geographies often engender an interpretive position caught or frozen between a worldly or familiar explanation of events *and* a purely supernatural explanation of situations. This uncertainty and hesitancy is, we would argue, the specificity and particularity of spectral geographies. Indeed, the interpretative criteria we use to understand spectral geographies must likewise be hesitant. Ghosts can never be *fully* understood, represented or brought into representation’ (Holloway and Kneale, 2008: 308). Will participants be able to accept what they witness as uncertain, in terms of its validity and its cause? Can they sit with competing explanations? Or do the imperatives of feeling ‘at home’ require a particular interpretative stance?

Experiencing Otherwise, Knowing Differently?

Perhaps to embrace uncertainty requires different ways of ‘being’ in the world. As described earlier, a focus on the non-representational, embodied moment of encounter suggests the possibility of loosening the boundaries between self and world. To extend the transformative potential of the embodied moment requires us avoiding the past bearing down too heavily upon the present. It is to embrace a form of uncertainty which is ‘indeterminacy’, a new form of phenomenology which takes away the gazing subject: ‘In contrast to Merleau-Ponty’s stress upon empirical ‘witnessed’ depth, Deleuzian depth is implicit – in the sense that it is that which is implicated (folded) – in the processes by which a subject comes to occupy a point of view’ (Wylie, 2006: 530). Both philosophers ‘suggest that the subject who will ‘come to’ a point of view upon this world, as an assemblage of perceptual faculties and epistemological capabilities, will be assembled precisely through processes of folding and intertwining’ (ibid).

Elsewhere, Brennan is enamoured by the philosopher Martin Heidegger's idea of "pre-logical thought". This is not 'irrational' but 'a mode of approaching being-in-the-world that permeated early Greek thinkers... before the categorization of our world into mind and matter, cause and effect, in-here and out-there had gripped and mesmerized the Western mind' (Brennan, 2004: 12). Elsewhere, the editors of a journal, *The Senses and Society*, describe their desire to 'challenge conventional theories of representation' (Bull et al., 2006: 5). This includes the idea of 'embodied' or 'affect memory' suggested by art historian Jill Bennett: a 'register of memory that is both embodied and non-representational', which is 'carried in the body... and transferred between bodies' (in Hodgkin and Radstone, 2003b: 19). Art theorist Laura Marks also refers to the 'precious knowledge of the body and the senses' (Marks, 2004); anthropologist C. Nadia Seremetakis believes that 'truth' is 'extra-linguistic and revealed through expression, performance, material culture and conditions of embodiment... Sensory changes occur microscopically through everyday accretion; so, that which shifts the material culture of perception is itself imperceptible and only reappears after the fact in fairy tales, myths, and memories that hover at the margins of speech' (Seremetakis, 1994: 6). Perhaps there are ways in which the 'body' of the home interacts with the bodies of inhabitants, whereby a different kind of meaning-making takes place. The ghosts, the uncanny events, cannot be 'known' in the rational sense, but is there nonetheless interaction, even communication? This focus on the 'extra-linguistic' offers the possibility of opening ourselves up to a different kind of knowledge of place – the sensory narrative of inhabitation, and of the house itself – an interchange or flow between home and inhabitant. It might even lead to ideas about witnessing the uncanny which contribute to unsettling the subject-object binary. For example, Devereux hopefully suggests 'three systems – ghost, place, and mind – deriving from the same quantum roots' that 'briefly interact: an intersection of mind and matter we simply do not (yet) have the information to truly understand. The whole show is put together in the magic theatre of the witness' mind, in the sensorium. It would be one unified event in which the old idea of objective and subjective realities disappear' (Devereux, 2001: 205).

But I want to exercise caution. Encounters are already mediated, in the act of being experienced as well as in their aftermath. The embodied moment is laden with past beliefs, fantasies, narrative representations, cultural framings, memories. Ahmed argues that it is impossible to separate our experiences from the past ideas and feelings which feed them, as: 'sensations are mediated... immediately they seem to impress upon us.

Not only do we read such feelings, but how the feelings feel in the first place may be tied to a past history of readings, in the sense that the process of recognition... is bound up with what we *already know*' (Ahmed, 2004: 6).

The interesting work is to explore the interaction between experience and its representations. Cultural theorists Constantina Papoulias and Felicity Callard rightly critique the turn to non-representation for creating a false split between representation and affect: 'The wager is that if we attend to affect and to how it courses through the body, we might edge closer to illuminating the elusiveness and vitality of the embodied present. Affect is thus seductive to cultural theorists insofar as it is not entirely bound by any social or psychic structuration. It promises an engagement with the living present and a break in the tyranny of representational memory – that is, with an apprehension of the present through particular understandings of representation and signification, as a second-order reality' (Papoulias and Callard: forthcoming).

The relationship between the bodies of inhabitants and the 'body' of their home, as described, already contains the complex weight of the past at the moment of encounter. And, as suggested, 'home' is also already an *imaginary* space, and imagination itself is 'situated': 'our imaginary horizons are affected by the positioning of our gaze' (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davies, in Gunew, 2004: 3). It is also our 'imagination that gives our experiences their particular meanings, their categories of reference. Whether it is 'border', 'home', 'oppression', or 'liberation', the particular meanings we hold of these concepts are embedded in our situated imaginations' (ibid).

Sociologist Nicolas Rose goes further: 'The ways in which humans 'give meaning to experience' have their own history. Devices of 'meaning production' – grids of visualization, vocabularies, norms, and systems of judgement – *produce* experience; they are not themselves *produced* by experience' (Rose, 1999: 25).⁴³ But Kuhn offers a more nuanced response to the issue: 'Emotion and memory bring into play a category with which... cultural theory... [is] ill equipped to deal: experience' (Kuhn, 2002: 33). Experience is 'not infrequently played as the trump card of authenticity, the last word of

⁴³ Memories and emotions are also mediated. Geographer Liz Bondi warns that distinctions between feelings and representations of feeling are 'unhelpful dualisms that detract from geographers' capacity to engage with the ubiquitous and pervasive presence of emotion' (Bondi, 2005: 23). Memory theorists Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone also argue: 'Memory, though we may experience it as private and internal, draws on countless scraps and bits of knowledge and information from the surrounding culture' (Hodgkin and Radstone, 2003b: 5).

personal truth, forestalling all further discussion, let alone analysis. Nevertheless, experience is undeniably a key category of everyday knowledge, structuring people's lives in important ways. So, just as I know perfectly well that the whole idea is a fiction and a lure, part of me also 'knows' that my experience – my memories, my feelings – are important because these things make me what I am, make me different from everyone else. Must they be consigned to a compartment separate from the part of me that thinks and analyses? Can the idea of experience not be taken on board – if with a degree of caution – by cultural theory, rather than being simply evaded or, worse, consigned to the domain of sentimentality and nostalgia?' (ibid: 33-34).

To explore this issue, it is necessary to focus on the stories people tell each other – the way they deal with the unknown by 'making sense' of their experiences in different ways. This allows me to avoid placing too much value on the idea of 'experience' as somehow more real, where truth resides, as implied by Seremetakis' 'extra-linguistic truth' (Seremetakis, 1994) and the other accounts outlined above. It might, however, suggest a rather straightforward focus on narrative. Theorists Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps, for example, confidently state: 'Personal narrative is a way of using language... to imbue life events with a temporal and logical order, to demystify them and establish coherence across past, present, and as yet unrealized experience' (Ochs and Capps, 2001: 2). Re-telling the story might be a way of claiming an experience as one's own, in the hope of discovering meaning in it, even, by doing so, to *contain* the experience itself or forestall its repetition.

As described, the fact that uncanny narratives cannot be 'closed' lends them to repeated retelling. The focus should be on the *attempt* to find meaning. This becomes, in turn, a methodological issue. Qualitative research like mine is essentially humanistic, as described: it might be deemed to reinforce rather than unsettle the idea of a 'coherent' subject by creating for such a subject a 'coherent' narrative. I am reminded of this by psychologist Stephen Frosh in this disparaging account which recalls Bennett's (1999) description of the 'literaryfying' of oral folk tales: 'The narrative turn in the social sciences has become increasingly important, with much qualitative research sharing its interest in reproducing, or re-presenting, the personal versions of experience that subjects describe. This usually means taking some kind of text and rebuilding it in a more convincing way and making of it a more coherent narrative. A person tells a story, but on the whole it is not very well told: it has too many twists and turns, too many

characters that contradict each other, too many gaps... The research task is to... tell a better story... In the course of this, the agency of the participating subject is [falsely] restored' (Frosh, 2007: 636).

But Frosh presents a caricature of the process. The point is not to focus on the 'failure' of representation, but to attend to the gaps themselves, the contradictions, the asides that don't quite fit the narrative, to show how the process of co-habitation, as indeed the attempt to secure subjectivity, is, perhaps, an ongoing struggle for coherence, not easily – perhaps never fully – conferred. That's not an idea for me to impose, but for people to show me. It is to attend to what the writer Iris Murdoch called the everyday 'edge where language continually struggles with an encountered world' (Murdoch, 1993: 195). Scholarship, as well as everyday life, she explains, 'involves searching for coherence ('making sense of things') and dealing suitably with the innumerable contingent elements which impede, divert, or inspire the search. Because of the endlessly contingent nature of our existence this quest can never reach a 'totalised' conclusion... Ordinary-life truth-seeking is a swift instinctive testing of innumerable kinds of coherence against innumerable kinds of *extra-linguistic* data... We are constantly conceptualising what confronts us, 'making' it into meaning, into language. But what we encounter remains free, ambiguous, endlessly contingent and *there*' (ibid: 195-196).

The paradox of non-representational theory will always be that our texts can never 'honour that which lies beyond the scope of discourse' (Bondi, 2005: 10): it rather silences research such as this one. Many of those who seek to go beyond 'naïve' humanistic renditions of subjectivity can only write in philosophical abstractions since they are not interested in hearing the way individuals take on the challenge of 'making meaning' in different ways. Focusing on individual experience clearly reinforces the subject-object dualism, however much subjects are positioned as fragmented or shifting, and experience as relational, open-ended, and ambiguous. My theoretical framework reflects the form the enquiry takes: to sideline 'subjective' experience might be to miss out on an interesting and useful set of insights which might tell us, indeed, about how 'subjects' describe their own struggles to maintain a self-at-home through a particular, challenging, context. The point, then, is to attend to the *quest* for coherence, and see how this process works in practice; or if, indeed, that is all there is to it. This is not an abstract philosophical project but something with a lot at stake for people in their domestic lives.

In the next chapter, I will examine the process of undertaking the research, including a reflection on the methods I employed. This will be followed, in turn, with chapters which will explore the key themes set out above: the relationship between the complex spaces and times of the domestic interior; the ways in which people co-habit with ghosts; and the different beliefs which inform the process of interpreting uncanny events.

CHAPTER TWO: THE RESEARCH PROCESS

In this chapter I will describe and explore the methods I have used, and reflect on the process of research. I end with a summary of case study details. I have used qualitative techniques involving interviews with people living in 'haunted homes' in England and Wales. Issues arising for this approach are illustrated by debates concerning ethnographic and participant observation methods as they spread beyond their anthropological roots. Researchers are required to 'become enmeshed within the social processes they observe' (McClenon, 2001: 62), and research data is 'contextual rather than cut from everyday life... researchers are engaged with their informants rather than separated from them' (Burgess, 2003: 242). During the 1970s, humanistic geographers turned away from positivism to focus on people's everyday experiences in a manner which treated these as 'localised, holistic cultures which could be made sense of only through in-depth observation, *in situ*' (Cook and Crang, 1995: 5). Geographers were influenced by ideas which viewed everyday actions as a 'result of individuals drawing on the structures of their 'culture', rather than these structures being seen as, somehow, existing 'outside' the mundane spheres of their everyday action and knowledge' (ibid). The aims of this approach have 'come to be considered quite favourably', but ethnography itself is 'fraught with philosophical, practical, moral and personal problems' (ibid: 6). Subjects are characterised as having cultures which can be 'read' by an apparently detached researcher', being 'isolated, pure and homogeneous entities'. Subjects are also treated as 'pure, transparent, and knowable carriers of uncontested cultural codes' (ibid). The key, they conclude, is to 'incorporate social and cultural theories' which take these issues into account 'from the very start'. Particularly important is not merely identifying where people are – socially and spatially – but also to question 'where they are coming from, going to, and where on this path the research encounter has occurred' (ibid: 7).

By the late 1980s, a 'new ethnography' was evolving; as geographer Pamela Shurmer-Smith explains, its advocates used the 'language of post-structuralism... to claim that

ethnography was less 'fact' than 'fiction'... They talked of a poetics and aesthetics of ethnography and they demanded that the convention of the objective observer... should be revealed to be a sham' (Shurmer-Smith, 2003: 250). This new generation of ethnographers were 'philosophically aware, reflexive and highly self-conscious about what they were doing and how they wrote it up. Acknowledging that objectivity was impossible, they prioritized the revelation of multiple subjectivities' (ibid: 251). As anthropologist Kamala Visweswaran complained: 'Ethnography, like fiction, no matter its pretence to present a self-contained narrative or cultural whole, remains incomplete and detached from the realms to which it points' (Visweswaran, 1994: 1). Its writing 'involves telling stories, making pictures, concocting symbolisms, and deploying tropes' which are 'symptomatic not only of disciplinary worries but also of more general philosophical confusions... of the imagined with the imaginary, the fictional with the false, making things out with making things up... lead[ing] to the even stronger idea that, if literalism is lost, so is fact' (ibid: 2).

For me, such 'confusions' are likely to be as much those of participants as they are the researcher; uncertainties about uncanny experiences are mirrored in those of the research process. How participants negotiate ideas about what is 'imagined', fiction or fact, is central to my focus, as is accepting the limits of my own knowledge about *them*, the level of uncertainty that I constantly grapple with during the process of interviewing, analysing transcripts, and writing up. But just as I explore participants' own ongoing quest for coherence to reinforce a sense of self-at-home, I need to believe that I will 'uncover' new, if provisional, insights and ideas, however much these are filtered through and coloured by everything I bring to this process. As described, some researchers might influence the type of 'insights' they gain: 'Observational studies of haunting phenomena are particularly subject to error since some researchers are strongly motivated to obtain evidence supporting a particular position' (McClenon, 2001: 64). As I have suggested, my 'middle ground' approach seeks to counteract this.

CASE STUDIES

I adopted a case study approach.⁴⁴ I liked the idea of the ‘case study’ as a situated snapshot standing alone as well as comparable with others. These eventually totalled thirteen, of varying sizes in terms of the amount of ‘material’ gathered. The main criterion was that participants continued to live in homes where they had experienced something uncanny, either in the past or on a continuing basis. I also had numerous informal conversations, email and telephone exchanges, helping to build up the wider context.

I wanted to avoid contacting supernatural ‘interest’ groups, which might limit the spectrum of participants’ beliefs. I also wanted to avoid homes already studied by paranormal investigators; I ended up with one. In order to find a broad range of participants, locations and types of homes, I adopted a ‘scattergun’ recruitment approach. This included sending out press releases to dozens of local newspapers and national circulation magazines, taking out a few paid adverts, describing my project on internet message boards, and talking to almost anyone I met about what I was doing. Most of my time was spent journeying around looking for notice boards. For practical reasons I limited my search to within about two hours train journey from London; the North West where I had a family base; and anywhere else I found myself in the course of life. I looked for places large enough to host public libraries, cafes, community centres and supermarkets, where I placed the following advert:

Is your home haunted?

Could you spare some time to talk about your experience?
I am a PhD student in Geography at the University of London. I am researching people's day-to-day life in homes they share with ghosts. Is the experience good, bad, or indifferent? Do you see the ghost/ghosts as a nuisance or just part of the furniture?

If you can help, please contact Caron
tel: 07985 192015,
or email c.w.lipman@qmul.ac.uk



⁴⁴ The aim of the case study approach, in one description, is to ‘develop theory... regarding the cases of similarities or differences among instances... of that class of event’ (George and Bennett, 2005: 17-18).

I reflected on how to position and define my research; my use of language would influence the framing of the project. I decided to use words which are widely understood in popular culture: 'haunted homes' and 'ghosts'. These were easy to communicate and fulfilled the main premise of adverts – to catch the eye. People did seem to see beyond the limits of this language; some had very particular views, including, for example, a preference for thinking about their home as inhabited by 'spirits' rather than 'ghosts'. How many people I discouraged making contact because of my choice of words is, of course, impossible to know. But this was probably unavoidable, as a chance conversation at a party suggested. A woman had witnessed the ghost of a young man in her Brighton home only a few nights previously. This unnerved her: she didn't consider it a benign presence and she already felt vulnerable, alone in the house for the first time after a relationship breakup. She refused to be interviewed, explaining that she didn't consider herself to live in a 'haunted home'. Her home was benign; the presence had just 'passed through'. If she agreed to be interviewed, she would have to admit the possibility of living in a 'haunted home', which to her suggested a continuous malevolent presence.

I picked up four case studies through adverts; some other people turned out not to fulfil the criteria, or changed their minds. The television producer, who had seen an advert, passed on a list of 'rejects'; one became a case study. I also noticed someone else's advert – for ghost tours – and interviewed the house's owner. Another developed after a participant saw a story from my press release in a local newspaper. One interviewee was the caretaker of a community centre I had asked permission to display an advert; another came from a response to a paid advert in the London Review of Books. I also gained a participant contributing to a BBC Wales online diary (this home had been researched by others). The last four came from word-of-mouth – a friend; an acupuncturist's Romanian cleaner; an aunt's Finnish masseur's friend; and, in turn, a friend of hers. As this list suggests, the scattergun approach is not for the faint-hearted. Case studies came unpredictably in fits and starts, interspersed with some long, barren periods when no one contacted me. At such times I thought the project risked failure, despite the fact that everybody I spoke to seemed to have had an uncanny experience or knew someone who had lived in a haunted house. I would not claim that the case study sample was 'random' in any strict sense, but ultimately I was satisfied by the range of participants, types of homes, and the mix of locations. Households were also diverse. Five were made up of heterosexual couples without children, or whose children no

longer lived at home. Four households included children living at home; a further two where visiting children took part in the interviews. There were five single, divorced or widowed females, and one single male. Lastly, one household was made up of three friends, two of whom rented rooms off the third. In total, nine homes were owned; two participants were employed to live in their homes; two rented their homes, one from a private landlord and the other from a local council; and, as described, one household was made up of the owner and two tenants. Eight case studies were situated in towns or cities (four of these in London), and five in rural hamlets or villages. Two homes were situated in inner city areas, six in suburbs. Two homes were in coastal locations, and five were situated in the North West of England and North Wales. The details of these case studies are outlined at the end of this chapter.

I had assumed that a relatively small number of case studies might allow for greater in-depth analysis and ongoing relationships to develop over time, where changes in experiences or responses could be tracked – in line with the ethnographic approach described above. This didn't happen. In many cases, I was treated with great hospitality, given lifts in cars to and from inaccessible rural locations, cooked meals, and allowed access into the nooks and crannies of people's homes and lives. People who agreed to participate entered into the 'spirit' of the project thoughtfully and generously, and I was touched by the level of openness and sometimes vulnerability they were willing to risk with a stranger. However, for most, there was also only so much time they could spare; they were busy juggling commitments, including jobs and children. Perhaps, had the material I gathered not been as rich as it was, I might have had to change my approach. In many cases, communication began as an email or telephone exchange before face-to-face meetings were arranged. Sometimes this process was repeated when new uncanny events were experienced; mostly, however, people promised to contact me if anything new happened, but I didn't hear from them again. They had fitted me into their lives, but didn't expect me to keep returning. I wanted to respect this; one way was not to request follow-up interviews unless participants initiated them.

HOME VISITS

I was aware that my role in people's homes was similar to the ghosts – we were strangers. Debates on the ethnographer as stranger have raged about how far this is a good or bad thing, how far a bridge that should or could be crossed. Sociologists Fiona Polard and Liz Stanley refer to Georg Simmel's discussion of the stranger as 'someone existentially uncommitted, who inhabits 'the public' domain, who is on the outside of close relationships, of insider's knowledge, of 'the private'' (Polard and Stanley, 1988: 53). Nonetheless, the ethnographer as stranger is 'a role to be explored, used and maintained, not merely traversed' (ibid: 56). And strangers can become intimates – in a limited sense: 'Research relationships are by nature not only power-structured... but also 'fleeting' even when they persist over time... As researchers, we know people not as actual friends but as people who feel they are licensed by our 'stranger' status to make us privy to very confidential information' (ibid: 80). One can also feel a 'stranger' as an insider too, as phenomenologist Ilja Maso suggests: 'Everybody can... have some of the experiences of the stranger within his or her own culture. After all, when somebody is confronted with some unknown fact, she or he has to change their frame of interpretation, at least in such a way that the meaning of the unknown fact acquires a proper place within this frame' (Maso, 2001: 137). People who believe they live with ghosts, then, might also feel like strangers in their own world. Some suggest different levels of public and private engagement, coining terms such as 'quasi-public' and 'quasi-private'.⁴⁵ Perhaps these could help delineate relationships between me as researcher, the participants, and the ghosts – where the line between strangers and strangeness, intimacy and privacy, are drawn and redrawn in different ways.

I also wondered how far I could 'intrude' into people's homes. Ultimately, it was unnecessary to hang around people's domestic lives; uncanny events turned out – in all but two cases – to be sporadic rather than continuous. I didn't want to succumb to a desire to witness an event first hand, to become a ghost hunter rather than a researcher focusing on other people's experiences. In all, nine out of thirteen participants invited me into their homes. For the rest, this was inappropriate or circumstances prevented it.

⁴⁵ Geographer Jane Jacobs uses 'quasi-public' in a description of city street life, to denote a 'form of social dynamic that remains fleeting, is (semi) anonymous but often repeated by the same participants' (in Maso, 2001: 71). 'Quasi-private' is used by sociologist Herbert Gans to describe a 'social dynamic in which the same participants meet often, know who each other are, but their interaction remains only along one kind of plane – for example, classmates in an evening class' (ibid).

One participant invited me, but in the end we met up in London; she had a long commute to work and was burdened by work commitments. Another stayed overnight in someone else's home and didn't want the landlady to know about the interviews; we sat outside in her car and she described the house's interior. One man wanted to invite me, but his wife refused. Lastly, the caretaker met me in the grounds of the house and pointed out the windows to his flat.

THE METHODS

The methods employed were carefully considered to gain maximum insights, mixing interviews which encouraged remembering past events with more 'embodied' and dynamic techniques for teasing out the physically intimate and ongoing relationship with the home as a collection of interconnected spaces. To this end, my blueprint included interviews, 'guided tours' of homes, and personal diaries, but the actual process led to many compromises, and some methods were more successful than others.

Interviews: The Blueprint

I expected interviews to play a major role in communicating with participants. As well as the need to heed the social context, I came upon this scenario by Derrida: 'An interview should provide a snapshot, a movie still, a freeze frame. This is how this person, on this day, in this place, with these interlocutors, struggles like an animal in a difficult position. For example, when someone speaks to him of actuality, of what happens in the world every day, and if someone asks him to say in two words what he thinks about it, he suddenly retreats into his lair, like a hunted beast, he engages in endless chicanery, he drags you into a maze of cautions, delays and relays, he repeats in a thousand different ways: "Wait, it's not that simple" (which always agitates or elicits a snicker from those fools for whom things are always simpler than you think)' (Derrida, 2002).

I didn't want interviewees to 'struggle like an animal', but I was aware that I would be asking them to articulate experiences which might be difficult to describe. I had to find a stance which balanced clarity about the ideas and themes I wished to pursue, with the flexibility to allow participants to lead me where they wanted to go. Sociologist Robert

Burgess defines the art of interviewing as being ‘able to conduct a conversation in such a way that the person you are talking to is able freely to express her or his opinions and feelings while, at the same time, enabling you to meet your research objectives’ (Burgess, 2003: 243). The semi-structured interview seemed to fit as a meeting point between the rigidities of interviews with a well-defined remit, and informal ones which ‘much more closely resemble ordinary conversations’ (ibid). Such an interview is ‘organised around ordered but flexible questioning’ (Dunn, 2000: 61). The sequence of topics covered is also ‘determined through the interaction of researcher and informants’ (Burgess, 2003: 243). This is closer to the idea of performative knowledge, which is ‘co-constructed in and through the interchange with the researcher’ (Frosh, 2008).

I was aware that many participants would share their homes with family or friends, and hoped I could get all householders involved in interviews. I also felt that participants might speak differently on their own than with others, and so I requested separate group and individual interviews where possible. The group interview was also an opportunity to explain the project and gain assents; those members of the household who had less interest in or experience of events could also, potentially, be convinced of their contribution at this point.

Interviews: The Process

Interviews varied in length from case study to case study, with meetings lasting from about three hours to almost a whole day; I met a couple of participants more than once. Starting with the group interview worked well in my first case study, a household of three friends (one of whom was also a friend of mine). I gained a sense of the social dynamic, and their different ideas about ghosts, which then informed questions for the individual interviews. Thereafter, however, it wasn’t always easy to keep people apart – especially the couples; sometimes people found excuses to hover in the background and listen in. In one house, the two young daughters also wanted to take part; the interview became solely a group one.

The semi-structured interview approach served me well. Sometimes, interviewees made different interpretative moves than I expected, and I had to make sure to maintain an attitude that didn’t ‘push’ an argument that didn’t fit. Similarly, when people didn’t

respond in ways I expected, I tried not to react. During the interview with a rather monosyllabic young man, I couldn't help but express incredulity at his nonchalant response to intimate and invasive uncanny events. Playing the tape back was a humbling experience; I had tried to fill in the narrative spaces, and seemed flustered when the emotional response was not the one I expected. And yet I realised he was telling me all I needed to know – a lot more than I had realised at the time.

There was a more general challenge in finding neutral words when asking people to describe their feelings. I tried to be aware of the influence of my own language in attempting to measure experience; in this way, as Frosh (2008) suggests, the narrative is, to a degree, co-produced. I tried to keep myself from inadvertently influencing interpretation, particularly when people struggled to articulate what they had witnessed, to avoid 'firming up' intangible, fragile experience into robust narrative 'events' – a difficulty at the heart of this project. Paying attention to how people themselves described their experiences was crucial. One participant, for example, used the term 'happenings', which suggested sporadic and impersonal events. But people didn't always use the same terms consistently.

Guided Tours: The Blueprint

I was concerned that the interview might be too static a medium of communication, not able to engage with subtler responses; a 'guided tour' of the home seemed to hold promise for this. It is a technique used by material culture theorists such as Inge Daniels, who used it to analyse the 'untidy' Japanese home (Daniels, 2001: 201-229). Geographer Russell Hitchings, in his study of private gardens, also conducted some interviews 'as a walk around the actual garden site, such that we were constantly reminded of the material presence of the plants in the garden' (Hitchings, 2003: 103). Similarly, I felt this method might capture a more spontaneous presentation of people's relationship to home, engaging more fully with its physical materiality; it also plays on the popular touristic 'ghost tour'. I also hoped it might allow participants to express what was significant for them without inadvertently being 'led' by me.

Guided Tours: The Process

As described, I didn't get the chance to see everyone's home, but the guided tour where this was possible did offer some complementary insights, allowed for another chance to check, reinforce or develop themes which emerged during interviews, and to explore people's engagement with their homes. One participant described a very subtle shift in sensation at a particular place when walking up a staircase towards the landing where ghosts had been seen. This response revealed itself only through careful scrutiny of movement around the house. But in general, people pointed out where events took place and repeated stories they already told me. On balance, I'm not sure how much more this technique added to the more conventional interview.

Video and Photography: The Blueprint

I used a video and sound recorder to help 'capture' insights from the guided tours for further analysis. By doing so I followed the ethnographic tradition of anthropological observation, which emerged at the same time as the idea of 'fieldwork', with its emphasis on 'direct observation and enquiry into native beliefs and practices' (Ball and Smith, 2001: 306). But visual ethnographers 'have been quite resistant to the blandishments of postmodern theory... The realist assumptions of the documentary tradition continue to inspire ethnographic uses of photography' (ibid: 309), despite the 'critique associated with postmodern theory [which] suggests that cultural description of any kind is a good deal more complex and political than envisaged by conventional accounts of fieldwork practice and ethnographic film-making' (ibid: 311).

I had, however, experimented with video as part of my Master's dissertation. I believed it offered a sense of the fleeting, transient and fragmentary aspects of experience of the ruined location.⁴⁶ Geographers have looked to film for its ability to capture movement, for its potential as a 'temporary embodiment of social processes that continually

⁴⁶ Technologies have their own traditions of use in ghost research, as described. Telegraph, telephone, television, tape recorder were deemed 'uncanny' for bringing the far and distant into the intimate spaces of the parlour. Instruments involved in the process of recording, storing or unleashing anomalous energies are in collusion with the excessive materiality of the haunted home, becoming psychic purveyors of uncanny visual effects, and even describing new phenomena; 'orbs' (specks of light, an early stage in ghost 'manifestation') did not 'exist' before digital media 'captured' them. Recent interest has focused on mobile phones as sites of supernatural communication. These might 'prove to be the location where the phantasmic choose to dictate its own obituary' (www.sitegallery.org/v8/ecuation/talkcon/haunted.html).

construct and deconstruct the world as we know it' in line with a 'recasting of representations as social relations rather than aesthetically or socially autonomous' (Cresswell and Dixon, 2002: 4). Geographer Mike Crang has also used the video recorder to play on the popularity of home movies, noting that these are 'dominated by a discourse of fun, special events and staged spontaneity' (Cook and Crang, 1995: 70). He believes these 'frames of expectation' may be helpful for 'revealing the practices constituting the bounds of the normal, the spontaneous and the exceptional. Camera work can therefore be used to prompt transgression or 'deliberate barbarism' against expected behaviour... and this may serve to highlight where and how normal routines are experienced' (ibid). This approach may be useful, but Crang overlooks the level of self-consciousness likely to be involved in a stranger taking videos for research purposes; it is impossible to mimic the real spontaneity which happens between family and friends relaxing in the knowledge they are not being overlooked. In any case, how can one judge what is a 'normal' response? Nonetheless, the benefits seemed to outweigh the disadvantages of using video and photography; I planned to use these for my records, as an *aide memoire*, rather than as a central method of and for analysis.

Video and Photography: The Process

Using a video recorder had drawbacks; it required technical attention and monitoring, and the spoken material gathered on it was time-consuming to transcribe. It can also set up a particular dynamic. It emphasises the staged element of the guided tour, the mock 'ordinariness' of the preamble. At times I felt interviewees became self-conscious about being filmed. One participant did not want me to film her face; another asked me to avoid filming a collection of antiques. There was also the power relationship always present with the use of these technologies; however much I asked people to lead me, I still held the video and decided where to point it. At times I felt I lost some contact; as a hand-held device, it requires the user to avoid eye contact by looking instead through a small video screen to check what is being recorded.

It is interesting to reflect on how I responded to these recordings. When transcribing and analysing, I found myself furtively watching to see if the video, camera or tape recording had 'picked up' anything unusual. I also became superstitious about the recording process itself. This wasn't, perhaps without reason. I had some unfortunate

experiences with technology which made me fearfully alert. One tape recording stopped and started again in the middle of a tape – losing perhaps fifteen minutes of interview. Henceforth, I became concerned that, if there were indeed ghosts, they might be able to influence technology. I checked equipment with more care than perhaps I might have otherwise. I used two tape recorders, starting one off a few minutes after the other. On one occasion, no equipment worked at all for many minutes, despite my best efforts; this became more embarrassment than ice-breaker. Then, for no reason, everything started working. Unnerved, I stopped the interview many times to check on the recording, interrupting the flow of conversation. But the participants incorporated this into their uncanny narrative, helpfully offering me a further example with a certain glee:

D: The [production company] brought a mobile studio on the drive [but no equipment would work]

RM: I did warn them that sometimes the spooks interfered with technology

C: You're making me check this again

My response suggests how cultural influences affected me. Had I actually caught an 'objective' image of a ghost, it could well have thrown the project off course, or forced some change of thematic direction.

I amassed a lot of photographic and video material. As described, I had already decided to use this as a personal research aid. Its unevenness – in that I didn't get to see inside everyone's homes – further convinced me that a prominent place within the thesis was not warranted. However, I have decided to include a page of images after the end of this chapter. This offers a taster of the diversity and ordinary materiality of the homes described in the chapters that follow; it also provides a glimpse of one case study's 'material' uncanny. The page is presented as a montage to honour the fragmented nature of the process of using visual technologies and of the nature of their use in this project, and of the fragmented nature of many participants' experiences of uncanny events. It scrambles any direct or 'linear' meanings or identities that might be attached to them. Lastly, it calls to my mind a number of interviews where people used photographs and scrapbooks as fragments of their own relationship to their home, an aid to describing their personal memories within it (see Ball and Smith, 2001).

Diaries

I had also planned to give participants diaries, in order to illicit responses which were less controlled or mediated by my interview questions and that might offer further insights not otherwise available. I chose diaries which looked presentable in a classical way, hoping the participants would respect them a little. But this method was not successful; people were at best politely lukewarm about the prospect of filling them in. Part of this was, again, for practical reasons; many said they didn't have time. Others expressed unease, as if writing about the ghosts was somehow the wrong thing to do. I had emphasised that people could censor anything they ultimately didn't want me to read, but they should not censor or judge their own thoughts; perhaps they already censored themselves, or wished to do so. After gentle enquiries on my part, I received some rather pained responses, suggesting that diary writing is not just a chore, but a difficulty. One householder maintained she had written in her diary, but had hidden it away because she thought it might anger the ghosts. A couple more said they had mislaid it but would have a look and get back to me – they never did.

ETHICAL ISSUES

I was concerned, as described, about the ethics of requesting entry into people's private homes. Daniel Miller acknowledges that researching the home can become a form of 'intrusion', and calls for ways to 'understand, through empathy, the diverse ways in which this intimate relationship is being developed' (Miller, 2001:1). He justifies such research by arguing: 'An anthropology that thinks that sensitivity about being too intrusive is demonstrated by remaining outside and respecting the distance of conventional social proxemics is a dead anthropology, that loses its humanity in the very moment that it asserts it in this claim to sensitivity' (ibid: 15). Perhaps Miller underplays the ethical issues involved in researching the home. I cannot tell if there were times I made people feel uncomfortable; I tried to avoid this.

It was also important to gain consent for everything I wanted to do. For my first case study, I gave all participants an A4 sheet outlining clearly what the research entailed. I asked people to read it, discuss any issues arising, and sign it. This was a very formal process and, I reflected, might have put people on edge a little. For subsequent case

studies, I decided to ask for verbal rather than written consent, allowing time for questions and concerns. Most important to people was the question of anonymity: whether or not people wanted their real names and addresses used. Many relaxed when I agreed to anonymity; for others, it wasn't such an issue. I decided early on that I would change all interviewee names, and this was well received until one couple objected: they wanted their real names used. My solution has been to abbreviate people's names, using the first letter of their first name. I have changed some initials shared by more than one interviewee, where this seems confusing to read. I also asked permission to use recording equipment. Most people were familiar with these devices and were not concerned; one participant refused to let me use a tape recorder.

Lessons were learned as the case studies progressed. There was, firstly, the question of where interviews should take place. My first group interview was in the living room. Participants expressed unease:

Ch: ...I know you might think this is really crazy but for me I think it's very disrespectful to speak of ghosts in the house where they live in

C: Is it like talking about someone behind their back?

Ch: Yes

C: I hadn't thought about the etiquette of this. Maybe I should just say that if there are ghosts listening, we are talking about ghosts, we are talking about you, and I apologise if it does feel rude

Ch: But I don't think it's about you. I think it's about our reaction, about how we interact on a day-to-day level

Thereafter, for those who were happy for me to come to their homes, I asked how they felt about where the interview took place. During the video tours, I asked if there were any rooms they preferred I didn't enter.

There was a further early mistake. As a gesture of gratitude and a way of making the experience as pleasant as possible, I turned up with bottles of wine. I was chastised lightheartedly afterwards by one participant, who believed the wine to be a tactic to 'loosen tongues'. It had, she said, made some participants give more details about the ghosts than one of them had wanted to hear; they all woke up that night feeling 'disturbed'.

The failure of the diaries as a method also illustrates the sensitivity of the subject-matter. My entrance into people's haunted homes might have upset a delicate balance. The relationship between householder and home is not always so fragile, but the presence of a researcher demanding that people think, feel, and analyse things which they may feel conflicted, confused or anxious about suggests the questionable ethics inherent in the project, despite my attempts to be sympathetically aware of this. There was one occasion when a participant reacted:

RM: [raises voice, accusing tone] I don't know. You see, you're putting - you're sort of giving me ideas that have never occurred to me

I was taken aback at her defensiveness; I hadn't thought I was leading her to a particular belief or idea. In contrast, her husband required a very different response: he wanted a strong argument, a robust debate, and challenged me to suggest theories to him. There was a need to respond differently to different participants.

A further issue concerned what I could offer in return for the time people gave to me. Certainly I made clear that I was a researcher rather than a ghost hunter or psychic. I couldn't help to explain uncanny events, or, if this were required, rid a house of an unruly presence. I was merely collecting information, which I then wished to use in any way I wished. During the course of the interviews, it became clear that some people, nonetheless, saw me as an 'expert' and asked me what I personally thought. I offered insights from other case studies and talked to them about the various ideas in circulation, although I felt uneasy in such a role, and my responses felt unsatisfactory. More useful, perhaps, was to offer reassurance that people were not alone, therefore, by default, not strange for having witnessed strange things. It seemed comforting for some to hear me talk about similar experiences, and I always ensured to affect a blasé tone about my research:

T: Everybody think, 'T, you're crazy'. And only one would listen to really – say it is true my story

C: People have all kinds of experiences. I do interviews and it's not crazy

A related ethical problem – which luckily only occurred once – concerned my decision to reject a potential participant because, in my judgement, she needed some form of

support I couldn't offer. I am uneasy about this decision. This judgement was, in essence, about the line between madness and sanity. Who was I to make it? The case concerns a woman living in a Liverpool housing association home who rang me after seeing an advert. She said she was possessed by a malign presence, a previous female inhabitant who had been involved in evil activities in the house. She sounded traumatised, inarticulate, confused, and alone. The housing association had refused to re-house her. What I could understand conjured up a scene from a horror movie. I decided it would not be appropriate for me to interview her, and that it was not my place as a researcher to help her. But I did talk to her at length and made some suggestions. We discussed her options, and she seemed receptive to seeking professional help, in particular, from a social worker. I explained how she might research the history of the house, in order to perhaps find 'evidence' of what she claimed about its past. This might persuade the housing association to re-house her. I also promised to contact a local ghost research group. They might help substantiate her claims, or at least take her seriously – helping her temporarily out of her isolation. I contacted this group; they said they would consider meeting her, but seemed reluctant after I described her distress. After a few weeks I rang the woman to ask her how she was. She said she had contacted a social worker, and seemed more active; but the ghost researchers hadn't been in touch. After this, and with a level of self-conflict, I decided I could do no more for her. I was left wondering if I had, in part, avoided meeting the woman out of my own fear of the extreme negativity of what she had described. The project's criterion – that people continued living in their haunted home – might suggest that most experiences would not be so extreme. Perhaps this rather suited me. I rarely felt any uncanny 'frisson' myself. There were only two instances when strange events seemed to happen whilst I was in people's homes, and I never directly witnessed anything. For that reason I was always the temporary outsider who never experienced the same feelings as the interviewees.

ANALYSIS AND WRITING

A key to my approach, as described, is to see where the material leads me. This is in line with some anthropological ethnographers, at least according to Michael Agar, who derides sociologists for imposing existing concepts on the material they have collected: 'They start their work ethnographically, in the sense that they make plenty of room for the people they're interested in... But then in the analysis of those materials, [they] often

jump in and classify data in terms of... prior theoretical concepts'. In contrast, anthropologists 'see data as containing their own patterns, their own concepts, and they view analysis as a long-term effort to figure out what those concepts might be. Maybe the results do eventually map onto some available theory; but if they don't so much the better. The new concepts bring you closer to the world of the people you worked with than available theoretical concepts ever could have' (Agar, 1996: 39-40). Certainly, this is what I have done: sought novel 'patterns' in the material, but I am not intent on creating new 'theory' to replace old theory as such, merely to shed light on a particular set of unique contexts. Sociologist Craig Gurney also stresses how an 'experiential perspective' must occupy some 'methodological middle ground... It should be sensitive to the intimate relationship between the individual and the home on a day to day basis. It should be responsive to changing trends in this relationship, and the inter-relationships of the household members... Abstract micro-psychological issues of emotional security, identity and privacy must be explored. Finally, all these issues must be dealt with in a framework coloured by the richness of the individual's experience' (Gurney, 1990: 35-36).

In practical terms, when all the interview material had been transcribed, I decided to analyse it case study by case study under thematic headings. Headings and sub-headings helped to organise the material as a first step: I could watch which issues and themes repeated themselves. As themes built upon each other, I looked for a systematic approach. Specific forms of textual and statistical analyses felt too proscribed and formulaic to be helpful. Instead, I used Excel spreadsheets for each major theme, breaking it down into smaller aspects and then running through the analyses of each transcript to see how often these, or variants of them, emerged, also keeping an eye out for others I might have missed. From there I had a good overview of which themes figured most prominently. I used this method to help me develop the general framework. I wanted to attend to the specific unique contexts of each case study, whilst framing my arguments through these wider comparative themes. Although this process started early on, as interviews built upon each other, the Excel spreadsheets did illuminate some similarities and differences in people's responses that I had failed to notice *en route*.

I paid attention to the flow of each narrative, watching for changes in interpretation or description. I also scrutinised recordings during transcription to watch for changes in

voice tone or physical expression. During one interview, the participant seemed to grow tired; her voice became weak, she yawned, spoke slower, and paused more between sentences. When the subject under discussion moved on, she became more energised and animated. I was able to make a tentative connection between these responses and different aspects of her life. Agar suggests: 'The structure of pause and emphasis helped see what we usually only hear. The transcript makes the poetry explicit. And the poetry serves as a rich point that calls for frames about the speaker, his biography, and the world he currently works in... Simple preparation of a transcript is far from automatic; its analysis, even less so' (Agar, 1996: 49). Unlike Agar, I followed no system of discourse analysis, but I did favour a verbatim approach to transcribing interviews, honouring every pause and stutter. As chapters were edited and cut, the quotations became shorter and tidier – a practical move fuelled by the need to cut text meant stripping ideas to their essentials. This was a useful exercise, part of developing my own sense of the thesis as a representation with a life of its own. The process of analysing and writing does require acknowledgement of my own voice in describing other people's experiences. The confidence to do this came gradually as I became more absorbed in the material at deeper levels. It was also an emotional process; I followed intuition and instinct to test if I was on the right track. A fear was that I might 'over-interpret' – go too far beyond what participants were showing me – and I was constantly questioning where the line might be, and how I might measure it.

Ethnographers Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson note that ideas emerge from a careful reading of transcripts in different ways: 'Useful analytical concepts sometimes arise 'spontaneously', being used by participants themselves... Alternatively, concepts may be 'observer-identified'... these are categories applied by the ethnographer rather than by members themselves' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 211). They maintain that research should have a 'funnel' structure', being 'progressively focused over its course'. They warn that a 'commitment to a dialectical interaction between data collection and data analysis is not easy to sustain in practice' because of a lack of reflexivity (ibid: 205). As geographers Ian Cook and Michael Crang also point out, ethnographers can't take a 'naïve stance that what they are told is the absolute 'truth'. Rather they/we are involved in the struggle to produce *inter-subjective truths*, to understand why so many versions of events are produced and recited. It is the ways in which people make sense of the events around them, and render these 'true' in their own

terms, that is most revealing about how their/our lives are embroiled in larger social, cultural, economic and political processes' (Cook and Crang, 1995: 11).

Through writing up, perhaps, these processes are revealed. Feminist ethnographers have suggested that researchers should not only pay close attention to research processes, but should be aware of the 'supreme importance of writing as the creation of ethnographic experience', rather than just a re-telling of ethnographic experience (Polard and Stanley, 1988: 51). Attention needs to be paid to how writing is a 'thing in itself – the way sociological (and by extension, related) work cuts out processes 'by which some experiences and knowledge but not others are depicted as 'important' and 'those that count'', the ways in which research 'is structured so as to operate (different kinds of) closure in the writing of different kinds or types of sociology'; and the 'operations of research power' in the 'relationship between writer and readers as well as between researchers and researched' (ibid: 52). I tried to continuously test my own 'insights' against the interview material, and to hope that the material that I myself produced extended the conversations I had had with interviewees as well as starting off new ones with a wider set of audiences. As the process progressed, I built trust in myself, and can only hope that this is shared.

THE CHAPTERS

The introductory chapters have suggested ways in which the project might contribute to a number of wider ideas and themes. The three substantive chapters which follow will explore the ways these emerged during the course of the interviews. The chapters are set up to examine the most central themes and their intersections in ways which best mirror the material. Taking such an approach, rather than presenting a series of separate case studies, disciplines the project around wider ideas without allowing submergence in 'descriptive' material. A particular risk of this project, for me, was to be too easily entranced by the strange stories people told. But perhaps my approach runs the opposite risk of presenting situated contexts in a too fragmented way. I try to mitigate against this by allowing space for people's voices to be heard through an extensive use of quotation, and by the fact that each chapter, although tackling the material from different angles, often returns to the same or similar material, thus allowing for familiarity with case study contexts and participants to emerge over the course of time. In the fourth chapter I also include four separate case study examples to offer room to

explore the complexity of these individual circumstances. Perhaps the thematic-led approach also allows for different aspects of people, and their lives, to emerge at different times, becoming in itself a comment on the relationship between coherence and fragmentation.

Chapter Three focuses on the home itself, its physical spaces, and their relationship with the immateriality of uncanny events. A close relationship between materialities and temporalities also emerged during analysis, and the second part of this chapter examines people's relationship to their home's past, the ghosts, and their own memories. Chapter Four focuses on the 'self-other' relationship between co-habitees – the ghosts and interview participants – and the strategies participants employ in attempting to maintain a sense of self-at-home. Chapter Five describes the interplay of different forms of knowledge, belief and evidence within participants' interpretation of the uncanny. All these themes overlap at certain points, but the chapters are designed to grow incrementally upon each other, as well as to focus on particular aspects of the experience of living in a haunted home.

I have devised a system of abbreviations for the case studies, each being numbered. Case study details are set out below. As a reader aid, I also offer a more concise list as a fold-out at the end of the thesis.

THE CASE STUDIES

CS1

This house is old, large and detached, situated in a very rural North Wales location; it includes an adjacent field. The owners are a couple in late middle-age: RM, who wrote an online diary for a BBC Wales website; and husband, D, a recently-retired headmaster. An adopted son with Down's syndrome, JP, made a brief appearance. There are many and frequent uncanny events, including sightings of a monk, young man and pregnant woman, and many words and images appearing on walls and other surfaces.

CS2

This is an upper maisonette in a large Victorian house in inner-city North East London. It is shared by three thirty-something friends: P, the flat's owner, and her tenants and friends K and Ch. Ch is considered 'sensitive'. There are many ghosts, including two lone males, but the focus is on a family group consisting of mother, father and daughter who 'reside' on the landing mid-way up the staircase, in front of Ch's bedroom door. The flat was sold before the end of the project.

CS3

This is a 1930s semi-detached house in a suburb of Ipswich. Owner, S, a twenty-something woman, lives with her fiancé, a builder, who did not wish to be interviewed. They bought the house four years previously and he is slowly modernising it. The ghosts are the recently-deceased previous owners, an elderly couple.

CS4

The participant, R, a fifty-something academic, responded to an advert in the *London Review of Books*. She lives in two knocked-through old farmers' cottages in a rural Wiltshire hamlet. The female ghost, 'Annie', is believed to be a previous owner; she brushes pictures placed aslant on the walls.

CS5

This is a large detached house – the oldest building in a Wirral village. A Finnish masseur who knew my family passed on details of the owners, a middle-aged Finnish couple, M and L, who had lived there for about five years. Husband, L, is a neurologist. Their visiting daughter, G, was also interviewed. The haunting focused on a female ghost, known in the village as the 'Pink Lady'. There is also a male presence and smells associated with a particular place.

CS6

T is a cleaner in mid-life, originally from Romania, whose details were passed to me. She has lived in London for about ten years, currently renting a room above a shop. Her visiting daughter, O, helped to translate the interviews. T has had a number of strange experiences since renting rooms in London, but the focus is on her current situation. She is paid to sleep in the same room of a large North London mansion most nights of the week. The owner, a wealthy middle-aged widow, is afraid to be in the house alone at night. T describes the 'attentions' of a male ghost in her room.

CS7

This interview took place in Bath, although participant M – a middle-aged freelance music teacher – lives with his wife in a Victorian end-of-terrace house in Bristol, backing onto the county cricket club grounds. His wife, who suffers from an unspecified illness, was unhappy about me visiting the house, so we met on neutral ground. M, who saw an advert, has experienced a number of different uncanny events in the house over many years.

CS8

D responded to an advert a friend of hers had spotted in Liverpool. She is a middle aged divorcee who lives with her son, F, in a modern council house in a rundown inner city area. She has lived in the house for 32 years, since it was built. Uncanny experiences are varied in nature but sporadic. F is also haunted by his grandmother.

CS9

V was on a list given to me by the television producer. She is in early middle-age and lives with her husband and two daughters (aged about 11 and 7) in a suburb north of Blackpool. The house is thirteen years old and forms part of an estate of mock-Tudor detached houses. There are numerous and frequent uncanny events, including electrical equipment powering on and off, footsteps, doors opening and closing, and objects moving. The family believes they are haunted by their recently-deceased grand/parents.

CS10

B is in his 40s and is a caretaker attached to a park community arts centre in North London. He has lived in a flat on the first floor of the house for eight years. I interviewed him in a café area at the back of the house. A number of ghosts have been witnessed. B focused on one particular event – a frightening incident in his flat a few years previously.

CS11

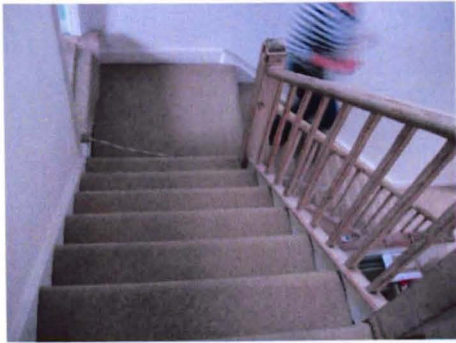
H and A are an elderly couple living in an old weaver's cottage in a tiny rural hamlet near Oldham, Greater Manchester. H is a friend of M of CS5, who passed on her details. She is also Finnish, her husband A from Yorkshire. They describe uncanny events – suggesting separate female and male presences – but the house has been 'quiet' for some years.

CS12

A is an actress and writer in her late 40s living in North London in a top-floor rented flat. She responded to an advert and told me how she was haunted by her dead cat, 'Spirit of W'. The cat 'followed' her from her previous rented accommodation in a different part of London.

CS13

A is the octogenarian owner of a small castle on the outskirts of a small coastal village in south Cornwall. She has lived there with her son for about thirty years. The building is a medieval tower set in gardens with a ground floor extension making up the living room and kitchen. The castle hosts 'ghost tours', for which A gets a cut of the profit. In the marketing literature, the castle boasts many different ghosts, but A herself is sceptical.



CHAPTER THREE: THE IM/MATERIALITY OF THE HAUNTED HOME

This chapter explores the temporal and spatial framework within which inhabitants of haunted homes live. In Part A, I focus on the ‘materiality’ of uncanny events as part of the physical spaces of the domestic interior, suggesting the complex ways in which material and immaterial processes interact. The chapter starts with a survey of events described by participants, which speak of a juxtaposition of the uncanny and the domestic. It explores ways in which these reflect or challenge householders’ relationship to the material spaces of home, and how this evolves over time. Part B continues the theme of the haunted home as a material space, with a focus on its different temporalities – how the materialities of home are inflected through temporal processes to further shape relationships between householder and home in different ways.

PART A: THE MATERIAL UNCANNY

Across the thirteen case studies, events experienced are extremely varied, but suggest the very materiality of hauntings, as suggested by Holloway, Kneale (2008) and Pile (2005). There are crashes, sometimes cries; words appearing on walls; shadowy forms; smells; singing; a ghostly cat; objects flying; pictures left aslant. In two case studies (CS1 and CS9), events occur almost daily, and the sheer volume and variety meant it was hard for interviewees to offer a thorough account of everything they had witnessed. Here was an excess, a surfeit of experience in the sheer number of events. In CS1, RM prided herself in remembering the dates of events, going back many years, but at times struggled to maintain an ordered chronology:

RM: There are too many incidents. And they are quite a variety of types. We’re only scratching the surface here. There’s stuff all the time...There’s just far too much

But for most, events occur unexpectedly at intervals. Sometimes these are many years apart: sudden, jarring, staccato moments within the everyday routines of domestic life. M (CS7), who lives in a suburban semi in Bristol, for example, has experienced about eight events over the course of twenty five years. These are unconnected to each other and to anything else happening in the house; coming out of nothing, returning to nothing, they retain a pure self-referentiality describing nothing but themselves. But M has noticed that these events have subtly increased in complexity and intensity over time. In contrast, elsewhere, early activity sometimes winds itself down. Events do not always start immediately; but, as discussed later, some believe a trigger is structural renovation work, which tends to be undertaken soon after the new residents move in.

Events cross the spectrum of the senses; many are fleeting and unbounded in character, and always at a distance; some intimate; and a few very distinct in terms of being clearly seen. By far the majority follow many historical accounts, as described, in being auditory, and illuminate, as Bermann (1998) and Kaika (2004) suggest, the ‘ordinary’ uncanny of the home as a complex soundscape. Ghosts are also vaguely sensed, and atmospheres are felt. All participants, then, speak to the uncanny *materiality* of these complex, ‘immaterial’ experiences. They interact with the materialities of the home, and with the inhabitants within it, in compelling ways.

There are a few examples of ghosts described as being ‘like flesh and blood’, where there is a strong sense of a *physical-like* reality. But more often ghosts are not seen at all; when they are, they tend to be shadows or outlines, something in the ‘corner of the eye’. The relationship between seeing and sensing is interesting because at times it signals merely a *feeling* of a presence; yet, at others, it leads to a very detailed description, as if the ghost is *seen* in the ordinary sense – a kind of ‘feeling sight’:

Ch: It’s almost like, it’s not like seeing you, sitting opposite me. It’s like seeing but sensing at the same time. It’s very hard to describe

...

C: You’ve said you’ve actually seen them there

P: I don’t know about seeing. It’s sensing the shape of them... and then, I don’t know where the rest of the picture comes from (CS2)

There are examples of physically intimate experiences of the uncanny, where something acts directly upon inhabitants' bodies, and sensory experiences suggest a real push or weight of something. In three cases, participants describe ghosts being in bed with them. In CS6, there is an intruding male presence: the witness, Romanian employee T, hears snoring and wakes to find 'a hand mark when I took my pyjama off'. In CS10, the event is more positive, as B describes being 'rescued' from an angry force rounding on him as he lay in his bed. He called out for help, and immediately felt the *weight* of a body roll on top of him to protect him. The haptic viscosity of his description mixes physical sensation with a feeling of acceptance:

B: I felt the weight – of a body – on top of me. Very comforting warmth. It lasted, five minutes approximately... and this comfort, which remained, this weight. And I didn't move. I felt happy, I felt accepted. It wasn't just a feeling of body. It was a comforting feeling. It was like a love... I took it as being accepted, I had been accepted... there was a care to it. There wasn't a cold physical protecting... It was like someone – who liked you

In CS8, D's son F is haunted by his grandmother in an intimate way: she 'slaps' him when he forgets to turn off a television or close a window:

F: I'll be asleep in bed and I'll get a [slaps his cheek] little slap like that. And I'll wake up and my telly's on or something like that

C: You were slapped?

F: Not like a slap, just like a little [he taps his cheek more gently]... Or like she'd move an arm or something for me... And like, I'd jump up and my telly's on

D: It's like a warning, to tell you to turn your telly off before you go to sleep

F: Yeah. There's always a reason. It's always like the telly's on, or the radio's on, or I've left a window open

The slapping and tapping is not an intrusion here, it is a reinforcement of an affectionate relationship – the grandmother is looking out for her favourite grandchild.

Elsewhere A (CS12), describes her relationship with her dead cat:

A: It very much was a physical relationship. She slept on my feet at night. Sit down and she'd leap on my lap... [Now dead] I can feel her on my feet. I don't feel fur, it's like a kind of heaviness on the feet. It's really rather nice. You can hear her scuffling around, lap water. If in the bathroom – W was not allowed there – you feel something brush past you at the back of your legs. I've felt that a lot. Yes, in a way that feels like fur, tickly

The sensations have changed: in place of 'fur' is a 'heaviness', although she then suggests the feeling is 'like fur': not-quite-cat, nearly-cat.

Liminality

Uncanny events are mapped physically onto homes, enhancing or challenging existing maps, physical, emotional, and habitual. Participants' descriptions of events highlight the way they negotiate the materiality of their home, its fabric, structure, objects, the spaces within and beyond. But a consistent motif is of events occurring in physical spaces regarded as 'liminal': staircases, landings, windows and reflections, doorways, corners, crevices, box rooms, spare rooms and ante-rooms. This, as suggested, replicates ideas about ghosts and certain spaces and times which have a long historical resonance, as suggested by Trubshaw (1995a) and Taylor (2004). Some participants discussed this:

P: It is interesting and I do wonder why it's a staircase [there is a family of ghosts living on a landing]. For me, the ghost I came across... she was on the bridge

K: Did she commit suicide on that bridge?

P: I don't know. She lived on that bridge. She was in a transitory place. And in psychiatric hospitals, it's corridors

Ch: Yes, they're always on corridors

P: I think [the staircase] is a lost place in-between

Ch: They're very transitional places. You know, people are waiting to go to some place, or coming from some place. You know, the spirit hasn't quite left the house, or whatever

P: For me, the doorways in this house are quite important... I think a doorway is an area that you might watch or mark. Doors have kind of frightened me... letting myself into places I'm not sure of... I do feel like doorways are a waiting ground. It's a place where people will be looking for me. Or that they will be hanging out (CS2)

Other liminal spaces include mirrors and reflections. In CS6, T believes that ghosts ‘live’ in mirrors, where they have a good vantage point for looking out on the world:

T: I have the feeling that somebody is with me all the time. Especially in the mirror. I think they can see me in the mirror... My feeling is he can see me more better in the mirror

O: She thinks the ghosts use the mirrors to check the room and what’s going on. It’s like their – headquarters [laughs]. That’s exaggerating. But they use mirrors

People often suggest two worlds existing in the same place – the ordinary world of domestic interiors, and, within these but also separately, the world of the ghosts or the uncanny. Here B in CS10 talks about the possibility of ‘entering’ the ghosts’ world through the paintings he creates:

B: [I am] engaging in the spirit world in a way – creating life in a painting, making an invention... Some are not very happy – full of anger. Some are very gentle. Some appear to behave in different ways. I don’t know whether they could hurt me if I came into their world. I think I may be able to enter their world. But I’ve never crossed a threshold. I do think there is a threshold

The focus on liminal spaces also reinforces the porosity of the home as a place with openings and passageways, and where the notion of fixed boundaries between public and private is problematised. The liminal is also the peripheral, a form of reinforcing distance between places within the home considered more and less private. Confining ghosts to liminal spaces maintains a distinction between inhabitants’ private spaces and where ghosts ‘reside’, as discussed in Chapter Four. The haunted home reinforces a dynamic between the domestic interior’s opacities and its fixed boundaries and thresholds in the way such spaces are both perceived and used. The ghosts seem at times intrinsic to this process; at others, they reinforce an existing dynamic. People’s relationship to certain places in their home is reflected in their relationship to the uncanny:

C: Are there places you avoid?

B: Yes, there are shadowy areas. Top of the office staircase, I don’t like that particularly. The ante-room [for storage] is a bit troubling because ghosts have been witnessed in there a few times by people

C: The top of the staircase –

B: Top of the office staircase. I go through there and it's a dark area. And I almost – I don't know if I always expect to see a physical confrontation there, or a strange – something odd about it. So it's whether somebody could be in that space, hiding. Or whether I'm going to encounter some uncomfortable feeling. But every time I walk through it in the house by myself – and the workshop, I don't particularly like. That's an area I don't like to be around in the night, locking up around there. I think it's not a very nice area (CS10)

B also describes the negative energies of the house lurking in those small, dark places not easily seen or controlled – hiding places – echoing a definition of the 'uncanny' utilised by Fletcher (2000) and Stewart (2003):

B: I know [demons] wait, lurking in every cupboard and corner of the house

'Liminal' spaces within the home might be places where ghosts lurk, but they are also places to keep ghosts at bay, given these are unnerving places already, dark and hidden, inaccessible or under-used, places only to move through rather than linger at, or places where you might feel a little on show. In CS5, M only ever senses the ghost on the landing by the staircase, never in more private areas such as her bedroom. It's not that ghosts don't ever make themselves felt in private spaces. When these are troubling, they spell problems with the co-habitation as a whole, as discussed in Chapter Four. But it is rare to find inhabitants avoiding particular places associated with ghosts. An exception is H in CS11, who describes her dislike for a ground floor living room, a particularly gloomy space:

H: I don't particularly like this room because I could hear the – somebody coming and wiping their feet on the doormat so many times

H and her husband repeatedly heard the sound of 'big boots' coming in a main door, and its memory still triggers an emotional response. There is another living room, directly above, from where the sound is witnessed. This well-used living space is markedly brighter and warmer. But it's not always possible to avoid such places. As described, B in CS10, as caretaker, has to lock up the workshop area at night, although he dislikes doing so. In general, however, confining ghosts to liminal areas allows

alterity to be kept at bay, as Morley (2000) suggests. It highlights the way in which some places are deemed more public, some more private, within the domestic interior. It is thus simplistic to describe the need to 'break down' public/private boundaries. These spaces are dynamic and complex and fluid; and yet they are also 'carved out' by people at a physical and emotional level in different ways.

Uncanny events also reinforce existing negative feelings about certain spaces. In CS2, K had been staying at home because she had recently suffered from chronic fatigue. She disliked her bedroom and spent most of her time in the living room. This difference in her feelings for the two rooms is reinforced by her sense of the bedroom as an uncanny space – where the main door and a door to the attic kept opening and closing. But the geographical positioning of these rooms also contributed to differing feelings of loneliness and connection. The bedroom is tucked away in the eaves, at the top of the house, with only a small window out over the back. The living room at the front has large bay windows onto the street:

K: If I was here on my own, I wouldn't go to my bedroom. I would stay here... and watch what was going on up and down, happening on the road. That was my access to the outside world. This window. Just spying on my neighbours, basically [laughs]. Which I did for a long time... I didn't feel lonely. But if I come up to do things in my bedroom, I feel kind of lonely

Being able to pinpoint ghostly activity as associated with a very specific space in the home allows a level of control, a sense of being freer elsewhere. People are unnerved when uncanny events associated with a particular part of a house occur where they haven't before. In CS7, most of the events – which are very disparate – occur at the back of the house, on the ground floor around the music room where M works as a teacher. But the most recent event occurred at the front, in the living room, making it doubly 'out of place':

M: The sixth experience was in the front room. I mean, most experiences tend to be associated with the rear of the house, like the breakfast room, or across the back. This one was in the front room. Quite unnerving, because it was out in the front room – early in the morning... I was down there. And I heard this, um – unearthly – the only way I

can describe it was like a banshee. A cry... I was standing near the settee, which is by the back wall now. So I was on the opposite side to the window

C: And it was definitely inside the room?

M: Yes

This event occurs whilst M is in the same room, a sound emanating in front of him. All other events have occurred from beyond at least one wall. This is another common theme – the ghosts are somewhere else, not quite ‘here’, suggesting their peripherality rather than their central place within the domestic interior. When ghosts reside at a well-used thoroughfare, there is a need to defy geographical normalcy. In CS2, a family of ghosts – mother, father, and daughter – linger together at a landing next to a bedroom door:

P: This is their area. I often feel that they’re living behind the door

C: On the other side?

P: Well [indicates the landing] this is the space they occupy. This is where I’ve seen them. But I sense they have a life inside of this room that I don’t know about. But I’m just conscious of them at the doorway. I’m not familiar with beyond this door. And maybe ‘beyond this door’ isn’t particularly a place, you know... it’s the feeling I have from downstairs that the ghosts live beyond this door, not necessarily that in reality they live in this room

Life ‘beyond the door’ is perhaps symbolic for out of reach, beyond the threshold of the known. But there is also an inversion of measurable geographies of distance and nearness, because even when standing in the midst of ‘their’ space in the landing, P doesn’t believe the ghosts are close by: they are both ‘here’ and ‘not here’, and mostly she senses them from elsewhere:

P: I never felt like they come near me. I’ve never felt a physical presence. So even when I’m – like now I’m standing – this has got to be their spot. I’m here. But I don’t think they’re close. They are always at some distance. I don’t know if it is them moving away. I don’t think it is them moving away, because when I’m downstairs I think of them as occupying this space

A further set of descriptions reinforce the *porosity* of the home: some ghosts appear to be equally at home in the garden. In CS1, for example, crosses and monk-shapes are found carved into tree barks, ‘painted’ onto the outside of a chimney on the roof, and words cut into grass and snow; a monk is sometimes seen both inside and outside. In CS4, the female ghost is described on two occasions to be looking out of a back window, as if surveying her garden. In CS7, footsteps are heard on a gravelled path in the back garden; in CS11, boots are heard to wipe their feet on the front door mat, as if coming in from the outside. In the case of CS12, the ghost cat ‘visits people. I had two to three weeks when she was at Auntie S’s, causing havoc. She saw her on her bed, she was chasing her cat’ (A). What constitutes ‘home’ extends beyond the physical interior, the latter which nonetheless remains as the central focus. When ghosts roam beyond the interior they are limited to the perimeter of its grounds: the land that ‘belongs’ to the space becomes a boundary marker. Even the cat, which goes further than any other ghost or spirit, to enter other people’s homes at quite a distance, is confined, A believes, to follow the ‘energy trails’ laid down by her – it can only go where she has gone before.

Nature and domesticity

In these examples, the domestic interior becomes both fixed and bounded, porous and differentiated, not a ‘static’ space (Shiach, 2005: 255). Case study material challenges another definition of the ‘domestic’ as a place of mundane ‘normality’. Uncanny events are sometimes described as anti-domestic, with the potential to disrupt an ideal of ‘natural’ orderliness, which is reflected in the material order of the home, and the processes and routines working to maintain it. At the same time, nature itself is described as a threat, something unruly, unbounded, ‘out of place’, breaching the boundaries of home in more exaggerated ways than Kaika (2005) and others suggest for the ‘ordinary’ domestic uncanny. In CS1, the outside invades the inside by creating a messy, viscous form of material uncanny:

RM: You get snail trails. Goodness knows where they come from. And it’s horrible. But you’ll get a word in the trail... [It] formed a sort of an acidic stain, it’s made a cross. Very annoying that, because it’s a beautiful piece of wood [above the fireplace]. It’s horrible

Water appears in puddles where it shouldn't – under a chair, on a bed, coming through a wall: unbounded liquid, defying the normal routes and channels and controls which keep it in its place. The central event is the constant appearance of many words on the walls of the living room and kitchen:

RM: We found a brown stain on the wall of the lounge, and it made a Welsh word

C: What was the stain made of?

D: Well we don't know... whether it's made of... I don't know, goat's urine and oak gorse or something [laughter]

The substance is both material and immaterial: it has a real physicality, and yet they don't know what it is made of. The words are also given an unruly kind of agency, reinforcing the idea of nature out of place:

RM: By the end of January... the whole wall had erupted in words

...

D: I was sitting in there and words... popped out on the wall

Words erupted and popped like spots or boils, the walls like skin, undergoing a biological, reactive process, suggesting the physical agency of the home itself, being neither ordered nor ordinary. Words turn up quickly, one by one, but fade slowly; they continually emerge and re-emerge. But there is a difference of opinion about the level of 'disruption' they cause. For husband, D, they should be left alone: home is a place of interest, curiosities. For RM, the words are like graffiti, they are blemishes, stubbornly refusing to be cleaned, only leaving in their own time:

C: You've used the word 'graffiti'. Is this how you see it?

RM: The lounge is a mess

D: Yes, I know, but it's been a source of interest

RM: [Fed-up voice] He won't let me paint again at the moment. But I paint every three or four months, and then the blessed spooks say, 'Weehee, we've got a blank canvas, let's start again'. And they do, within minutes, hours

C: Why won't you allow her to paint again?

D: Well, at the moment they're rather special. You've got some big pictures of monks all over the walls... They're just interesting

...

D: The brown stain does fade over time

RM: But you can't wash it off. Because I've tried

Elsewhere, this attempt to contain 'anti-domestic' events is expressed with more desperation, as damage-limitation in the heat of the moment. One night the household of CS9 experienced the chaos of poltergeist-like phenomena – pictures flying, washing tipped from a basket, cigarettes and CDs thrown onto the floor. They rang a local psychic medium who told them not to touch anything until she arrived. However a friend, J, could not help but intervene:

V: By this time the ketchup on the table had moved to the edge of the table and was dripping onto the carpet

C: So the ketchup was on its side?

V: Yep. Yep. And the lid open. They'd opened the lid and it was dripping onto the carpet!

J: I picked it up. I stood it up to stop it dripping. But [the medium] had actually said to leave everything as it was

The friend becomes a defender of order, stepping in at the point when an event was starting to cause just too much damage.

In general, however, uncanny events leave few material residues, little trace; all sound and fury, signifying nothing. At times, events also appear to *almost* replicate nature. D in CS8 recalls hearing the cry of a baby. What made this particularly unfathomable was the fact that there *was* a baby in the house. The uncanny reflected back social circumstances:

D: We'd be sitting here like this, and you'd hear the baby's cry. And then, we'd go up, but he'd be asleep... Then my daughter heard it, she heard the baby. She said: 'Mum, it came through my stereo over night'. And it happened quite often when she'd be in the bath. And the box room is [next door to the bathroom], and she'd come running down with her towel around her. She'd say: 'That baby's crying again in the box room'

The focus later turns to a ‘gorgeous, very expensive’ Victorian doll which is suggested as a causative agent of uncanny events:

D: It was one of my friends, she said: ‘It’s that doll – do you think it’s anything to do with that doll you’ve bought?’ Yeah. And everyone I spoke to... said to me, ‘Oh, bin the doll’. And then [another] friend said to me, ‘Oh, I’ll buy the doll for what you paid for it’. So she bought the doll, because she collects them. And then, she was ill in bed, and she said she was hallucinating and the dolls were dancing in front of her! She said, ‘I got up and I just binned the lot’. She said she got all the dolls together, put them in a plastic bag, and they’re going. I said: ‘I told you about the doll’

This sense of unnatural power infusing an otherwise inanimate object speaks of the way the uncanny can be both ordinary and mundane but also powerful, resisting containment. It is merely a doll, but it is an object with a face and form – it apes the animate. Victorian dolls have been a focus of cultural unease – indeed, a popular motif in early twentieth century ghost stories, as described – because they are so ‘life-like’ – their eyes look like they might actually be watching.

The animation of the interior and its objects also suggests non-human agency as a *bad copy* of nature, ‘bad’ being something which doesn’t quite make the grade (not-quite real), and something ethically suspect, of unknown, potentially malign intent. The gap between the thing and the almost-thing is imperceptible but critical. A belief in the orderly domestic interior as a foil to the uncanny – opposing its tendency to produce mess and chaos – persists. At heart, this move is about controlling nature. ‘Successful’ domesticity becomes a weapon to ward off the uncanny. There is the hopeful belief that an orderly interior might keep out what is unruly, unnatural and unexpected. In CS4, for example, there is an assumption, as described earlier, that a ‘haunted home’ would be unruly, reflected in the material arrangements of, and type of, its objects. The inhabitant, R, complains that she battles with too many personal belongings, too many books, to fit into her tiny cottage. In comparison, her mother, who uses the connected adjacent cottage at weekends, maintains order – a proper home-keeper. R first showed me photographs of her cottage when it had just been renovated:

R: And then this is all lovely when it's all completely pristine and tip top... This is when it's at its minimalist state, you know. It'll never be like – look at the clutter, it's now thick with clutter

We met in the lounge of London University's Institute of Historical Research. This is a large, quite stately old room with a number of old portraits of dignitaries on the walls:

R: The house is so ordered and domestic and nice when mummy's there. It just looks like a rational place. This place, with its old portraits, I could imagine was haunted. But my house, with its paperbacks, the new fireplace, doesn't seem like a haunted place

Something about the old paintings creates an uncanny affect, compared with the new objects in her cottage, which are rather ordinary and familiar, perhaps not worthy of the attention of a ghost. A room with old paintings might be haunted, not one with paperback books. There is the additional belief that her mother makes the house too 'ordered and domestic and nice' to allow anything irrational to take hold. Elsewhere, R tries to interpret the fact that the uncanny events only tend to happen in *her* cottage, not in her mother's. Here the theory is that her mother restores order when she stays, keeping the haunting at bay.

CS6 provides a further example of the uncanny kept in check by tidy domesticity. T's landlady is fastidious about her house:

C: She has a social life?

T: A lot. A lot. And the fridge, it's full with food – she has very clean house. Like museum. Very tidy. Maniac clean. The cooker is clean like it's new. Everything is nice and tidy

The house is like a 'museum', the cooker like 'new'. There is an impersonal aspect to this description, as if the house is a public display for guests, rather than a home which is lived in. But the emotion underlying this woman's relationship with her home is fear, so much fear that she employs T to sleep over night so she is not alone. She keeps the ghost at bay, and contains her own fear, but in doing so perhaps loses a sense of the house as a home. Maintaining order for this owner suggests an anxious need to retain a sense of ownership through control; and yet it seems to lead to further disconnection, as the uncanny place mirrors a feeling of being 'unlived' in.

Elsewhere, however, a tidy home is a place where uncanny events gain more attention, making what is out of place more obvious, highlighting the unruly *within* the orderly. A tidy home brings uncanny events into starker relief, reinforcing a mischievous agency as events seem to parody as well as defy such order, moving objects from their 'proper' places. For D in CS8, successful domesticity means just this: maintaining all household objects in their place. She knows exactly where everything is:

D: If somebody moved that from there to there – I don't like it. They've got to be back in that exact position. I just can't – you know! You probably think I'm weird, but – it's just – the way I like things. It's a calming effect on me

So when important objects go missing, this causes D much frustration:

F: Things just go missing, don't they?

D: Things go missing

F: Right. You go to look for something and you know where it is, and it's just not there

D: I needed my passport. We were going away. I am meticulous with everything.

Everything in this house is in a place where I know where it is. The passport was gone from where it was. Combed everywhere... Then the next day we had another go in case we'd missed it. This went on. In the end I... went and bought the new passport. And then a couple of weeks later, F opens the drawer where things are, and there's the passport, just lying on top of the drawer

C: Where you'd already looked?

D: Yeah. We'd had the drawer out. Everything out. Just been placed on the top of the drawer like that, the passport. 'Mum, here's your passport'

But tellingly, domestic order is maintained by some *ghosts* themselves, suggesting the importance of gender, a theme developed in the next chapter. These particular ghosts are house proud females still attached to their homes and the domestic rituals which maintain them, and sometimes even influencing inhabitants to 'improve' their own domesticity. As described, the ghost of F's grandmother keeps an eye out by slapping him when he forgets to close a window or turn off the television. Her concern is very mundane; it is about keeping order in the home, keeping everything in its place. He interprets this as an expression of love.

In a further example, a ghost can't stop a habit of a lifetime. Ch in CS2 describes the ghost in her previous rented home:

Ch: And there was an elderly lady [the ghost of a previous inhabitant], she was very clean and tidy, we know that much. I used to feel very uncomfortable, even though I was there on my own with no one telling me to tidy the flat. I was very uncomfortable, almost guilty because the flat wasn't tidy. I used to have to tidy it. A [living] friend of my nana's – she was compulsively cleaning. And you don't go around cleaning other people's flats

These examples reinforce the relationship between women's traditional role, the gendered nature of domesticity, and continuing attachments to home. If household routines in part concern maintaining order, domesticity is about holding the house in check: if participants don't do this, some of the ghosts clearly will. Uncanny events thus need to be differentiated; their relationship to domesticity and to what is deemed natural or unnatural within the interior is complex. Later, I will also suggest ways in which the home itself is given agency, and how people's responses to the ghosts, or uncanny events, are also 'contained' by the home: the home as material body and holding vessel.

Familiarity

Underlying a complex relationship between what is familiar and what is strange is a sense that home as *already* uncanny, as Kaika (2004) argues. Participants sometimes suggest that within the ordinary material and sensory complexity of the home, the uncanny has to fight for a place to make any impact. An orderly domestic environment might be a foil to the uncanny, but the domestic interior is often a busy, noisy place:

D: I suppose the home – the house is full of objects we have collected over time, which have associations. It's a unique house. There are all sorts of bits of us around. And bits of – grandchildren. And photographs of [pause]

C: So, you fill it with your life, your memories, your personality?

D: Yeah!

C: In different ways

D: Yeah!

C: Somehow the fact that you've filled it with your own lives counteracts or – the fact that there is strangeness in the house – ?

D: You sound as if you're suggesting that – we've so filled it up with our lives that there isn't room for the strangeness to have any impact

[Pause]

C: Or perhaps a counterbalance?

D: Hmmm. I need to ruminate on that one I think. As to how it works [pause]. Because it [uncanny events] doesn't cause – doesn't cause much disruption (CS1)

The 'familiar' and how it is constituted is, perhaps, an overlooked aspect of much work on the uncanny, with its fixation on strangeness. When sound events seem to ape the 'normal' sounds made by domestic routines of the home, its appliances and inhabitants, the uncanny almost becomes familiar, an existing part of the everyday life of the domestic interior. Events, for example, repeat mundane actions which service living bodies (for comfort, food, warmth), where no body with such needs exists. In CS6, T recalls a kitchen which appeared to have been cooked in:

T: You hear a 'ping' and when you go out the lights are on. And the kitchen, it's hot like someone has cooked before you, and no one has cooked before – I hear the noise, 'du', the door's moving, and I go out and nobody was there

Not being particularly dramatic or different to ordinary noisy processes of domesticity, uncanny events can even at times be overlooked; 'little things' sometimes need to be collected before they add up to a robust suspicion of something not normal. T describes how she had a 'little strange feeling' when she first encountered the house she is paid to sleep at. She suggests her feelings were roused by the darkness of the hall, but added:

T: [It was] just little things. I thought, 'There must be something strange in this house'

A similar description is given in CS1:

RM: Then fairly silly little things started happening in the house, which you would normally just say, 'Oh, isn't that odd?' but when you add them all together... You know, it was just daft... and normally you wouldn't take any notice. But it was, these things started building up

C: So, just small domestic –

RM: – those were, to start with

There is a sense of build up over time, either a real escalation or, mostly, a growing awareness – the development of a haunting *narrative* as much as the ricocheting momentum of events: these are described into existence. But the narrative cannot exist as separate to the *experience* of the domestic interior – it emerges out of it, echoing ideas about the sedimentation of everyday life described by Young (2005) and Casey (in Young, 2005). Subject-object distinctions – where events are either objects of enquiry or feelings internal to witnesses, or both – emerge and collapse and re-emerge, reinforcing ideas about the uncanny as an experience rather than an idea. Uncanny ‘experience’ is both excessive of experience and also indivisible from it in an ongoing, complex process which might call to mind Deleuzean-influenced ideas of affect and emergence, except, perhaps, that this process is brought into being and given life through the descriptive narratives of particular subjects. In CS5, for example, the smell of coffee, bread or pipe smoke is experienced in the same corner of the living room at the same time most evenings:

C: Do you remember how you reacted when you first experienced these smells?

G: I think that, maybe when it was the first time, you didn’t much think about it

M: I didn’t much think about it. It was only when it started to repeat itself

G: Yes. You thought, ‘Well’ –

M: Something is going on

G: Yes. They are making coffee for the night [laughter]

When people experience an uncanny event, they are often doing other things, immersed in a domestic task or pastime. They are mentally ‘submerged’ in their activity; the events emerge out of the everyday scene and yet people perhaps require a particular, habitual, focus upon it to become receptive:

S: And I don’t know what I was doing, but I was doing something in the bedroom and I just happened to look in the mirror [and saw a ghost] (CS3)

Similarly, S’s friend’s son ‘happens’ to look up at a particular moment and sees a ghost; but as soon as he does a double take, the ghost disappears:

S: He said he was kickboxing, and he happened to look, and this man was sitting there like this, with his finger on his chin, and he looked at [the boy] and smiled. And [the boy] looked away, looked back, and he had gone

In CS11, there is a typical example:

H: She [her neighbour] was on all fours in the kitchen flag floor... scrubbing the floor. And realised there was somebody watching her from the doorway (CS11)

And the experiences themselves often replicate domestic routines; it is just that such routines are out of place and time and have no human cause. The prime example is the ubiquity of footsteps; these occur in *every* case study. In CS8, D hears someone walking as she lies in bed one night:

D: Something was walking up and down the stairs. Clear as hell

C: What kind of tread?

D: Oh, heavy... Heavier than we'd walk up the stairs, really. I mean, it is a wooden staircase, and you do hear the creaks, but this was like [she makes a repetitive sound], and right up to the top. At the top of the stairs, I've got a loose floorboard, and once you step on this it goes 'ruoop'

C: So you could hear that?

D: Yeah. The thud on this loose floorboard. And I don't know to this day what that was at all

The aping of processes can even be personal, about intimate, caring, activities – usually replicating a gender-specific idea of domesticity. In CS5, for example, the ghost is heard and felt to replace a blanket on a bed – ‘like when mum’s coming and checking if you are in bed, and if the blanket is off, to put it on you’ (G).

Doors moving are another common experience, and normal and uncanny interpretations need to be separated:

Ch: I'd often be sitting and the door opened. You could say that the latch isn't on properly, but even with a stone put up against the door, it opens

...

K: When I walk in a room and a door bangs behind me, it's very, very – and it was very noticeable. And I thought, 'Yes, that is strange', because it wasn't windy (CS2)

Another example of the uncanny aping the familiar is when a name is heard being called. In CS8, this is a repeated event involving F's grandmother:

F: I went to pick my drink up, and I heard it. Then I woke up my mum and said, 'Did you shout at me?' And she said, 'No'. But I definitely heard it

Events become familiar when they are repeated over time. F is used to hearing his name called: it has been happening for five years. Familiarity also mutes emotional responses:

M: I think when you have these experiences the first time, it's very alarming. But if they're repeated, they're much less alarming (CS7)

In CS5, the uncanny smells have become immersed in everyday life:

M: I sit here very often in the evenings. So I have the same experience very often... So it repeats. It comes again and again

G: I think it's either tobacco or coffee for example. It's not a mixture. But last night, you said it was baked [bread]

M: Last night it was baked

C: Does it go in cycles, what the smell is?

M: I don't know any particularities about this, because now I know it's there, I don't pay any attention. I think [she sniffs] 'Oh, it's coffee today!' Or, after a while [sniffs], 'Obviously, he has his pipe now'... The point is, we have learned to take it more or less everyday life, and natural. And so, it's rather difficult to remember this

This sense of familiarity over time is captured by the inhabitants in CS1, where events have come thick and fast for years. D recalls the first time he noticed a word had appeared on a wall, his language full of bafflement and excitement. He seems nostalgic for such a feeling of wonder:

D: 'Let's see, there's a dirty mark on the wall over there' [pause]. 'Funny' [pause]. 'It's a word! It must be Welsh! It ends in double 'd''. And that was quite incredible. And

then, a few days later, I remember – in the evening. Going over that wall. Hand by hand by hand looking – to see if the plaster is corrupted, is there anything here which is of interest, and so on. And then sitting down and looking up a bit later, and, underneath the wall light was another word. I said [whispers] ‘My god, it’s another word’. Oh, it was quite an impact! ‘This is incredible!’

The excitement involved in this initial response to an event is in sharp contrast to the current attitude after many years:

RM: It’s not everyday conversation to us. Ok, D’s noticed something else on the wall. But that’s not – unless something happens. But we don’t even get – I mean, for instance, if D had said: ‘Oh, there’s such and such on the wall’, and I was doing something on my computer which is much more important to me, I would say, ‘Oh, I’ll come down and have a look later’. When it first happened, obviously we’d be there. Oh. You know. ‘Something else!’ We’re so blasé about it now that I wouldn’t even bother to get out my chair, if I was watching television, to come and have a look at the latest phenomenon. I’ll see it in my own time

The strange *becomes* the familiar and ordinary, although it cannot be *completely* ordinary: there are still times when events can elicit a subtle feeling of strangeness:

M: Weird is the norm here. That is the norm. That’s what we live with... I mean, from time to time, it can be a bit disconcerting

At times, the ghosts themselves are accepted as a rather ‘ordinary’ aspect of the home, which further mutes responses to them:

P: I’d dodge around the word ‘ghost’ because I find it a bit, a bit silly

C: Why’s that?

P: Well, it sounds all mysterious – when I don’t think they’re very mysterious... I actually do feel a very ordinary presence of those ghosts. And it is extremely ordinary (CS2)

The ordinariness of many *uncanny* events also makes emotional responses to them more subtle:

M: If something is flying in the house, then it's a rather unpleasant place. And you have to be careful that the chair doesn't hit you on the head. That would have been the end of the whole story... [but] it hasn't made such a strong impression... Nothing to worry about (CS5)

Some events unnerve people only when they are *novel*. As described earlier, M in CS7 is disturbed when an event happens in a new part of the house. The events he experiences are very different in type, but he discerns a familiar pattern in the places they occur. In CS12, the ghost cat has to really act up to get any attention:

A: I've got to the stage when I don't think about it too often, unless she does something very naughty... I only really notice when she does something really naughty. I have a very busy life. I don't really notice it

In CS9, V describes a strong response to one event which frightened her because it was *new*. This is a house where experiences happen 'practically every day':

V: I ran out the house. Because that scared me

C: And how did you feel having to come back to the house?

V: Nervous. But I mean I knew nothing would happen, that it had just basically scared me because it was unusual and not something you – you know, balloons don't do things like that [move across the ceiling as if being pulled]. A lot I've got used to. So the lights going on and off won't bother me at all because I'm used to it. But if something new starts, then that scares me. But if it carried on and carried on and carried on, then after a while it wouldn't bother me

There is also a difference between an immediate reaction to an event and its more diffuse emotional after-effect. One participant recalled extreme responses: 'my sort of – hair stood up'; 'I was petrified. I found it very, very unsettling' (CS7). But the shock and fear of an unexpected and unaccountable event close at hand does not seem to impact much on everyday life. The anticipation of events, for example, is sometimes played down:

M: Amazingly, I just accepted that it had happened... I mean, one just gets to sort of – accept these things [laughs] (CS7)

R in CS4 downplays any lasting impact:

R: I mean, I'm interested and intrigued. I find it strange, funny. And when it really happens, I think, 'Oh my god, that is so spooky'. But not frightened. Spooked. For a minute

To be 'spooked' suggests a momentary response; to be frightened, in contrast, goes deeper into the psyche and is likely to hang around. The moment of experiencing an event is captured by S in CS3, who describes the process of seeing a 'reflection' of a man in the kitchen window:

S: I just sort of thought, 'Oh!' You know. And then I thought, 'Yeah'... It doesn't bother me. It makes you jump a little bit when you're not expecting it, but other than that, fine. And I always have a look around and have a look to see if they're anywhere else, but they're not

The initial surprise makes her jump – 'oh!' She quickly registers the experience, placing it into the 'supernatural' category, settles into a confirmation, having understood what she has just seen – 'Yeah'. Then she checks the place to see if there's anything else happening – if the ghost has nipped around a corner. Later, she suggests the way she anticipates the possibility of a recurrence, hoping that this won't happen because it will disrupt her night's sleep:

S: Sometimes I think, 'Oh, I'm so tired, I don't want to see anything tonight'. But other times –

C: Why's that? Would it wake you up?

S: Yes, I just think I'd be like, 'Oh, my god!' – and I wouldn't be able to get back to sleep again

C: Jumpy?

S: No, just like, curious really, and like I'd wake up and think, 'Ooh!' And sit here thinking about it and – I'd be thinking about it so much that I wouldn't be able to go back to sleep

The event, and its anticipation, causes some emotional disturbance, but excitement rather than fear. There is an after-event reverberation, and then a general looking out for further events, but the process is short-lived and it is only at certain times that she remembers the house is haunted.

Elsewhere, in CS9, the events of one night are described as frightening – perhaps the most poltergeist-like of all accounts – but, in telling the story as a family, the emotion felt at the time seems diluted by the distance of recall, and they find the chaos that ensued that night amusing:

V: It was scary

G: Mum was crying

J: You were all running from one room to another, weren't you?

All: Yeah! [Much laughter]

If the sudden awareness caused by something new and strange produces only a short-lived reaction, even particularly unexpected or jolting events can eventually be incorporated into the 'familiarity' of home over time. In any case, as described, the complexity and chaos of everyday domestic life sometimes mitigates against the uncanny having much impact. This complexity is as much about people's social concerns as it is about the materialities of home, and in this way there is a willed submergence; people push uncanny events into the background because they have other things to worry about: 'I'm too busy to get concerned about this' (CS4):

RM: We talk to people like you about it. If anybody comes, a stranger, we'd say: 'Oh, by the way, did you know our house is haunted?' And we'd tell them a story, and they're interested in it. But it doesn't – on an everyday level, we have much more important things to consider. And – our grandchildren, and, you know, that sort of thing (CS1)

The couple in CS11 express surprise that an event happened during a busy time, when they had just moved in and were 'making' home:

H: We were so busy – removing, stowing things away, painting walls, wallpapering

A: When you think an [uncanny] incident like that [hearing a whisper] would still be there, would still be prominent with all that going on

H: Yes

A: With the kids running around. This, that, and the other

There is an expectation that events are more likely to be noticed when the busyness of domesticity quiets down – a further convention of the haunted home, that it comes ‘alive’ at night. In the same case study, a further repeated event happens when this couple *do* expect it – being in the evening and also after the children had left home:

H: We did hear – movement downstairs. As if big boots were – we heard the occasional time, early evening, sort of ten o’clockish. Because we sit here. And when the children were around there was enough movement anyway, we didn’t take much notice. But they moved out... and there wasn’t anybody here. And we were sitting here, and I could hear movement downstairs, as if somebody was coming in. Ten o’clockish

Ch in CS2 also makes the connection with night time:

Ch: I think it’s [the supernatural’s] there and it’s blocked out. We’re too busy in our lives. I think a lot of times we’re very, very busy, things are going on around us all the time. And it’s when you’re quiet – I think that’s why people notice ghosts mostly at night time, because they are quiet, and their minds are more relaxed, and they can sense it more. Whereas during the day people are busy, they’re doing things. You know, I’m never in a room talking with friends and notice, ‘Oh, I can sense a ghost’. Whereas if I’m in the room on my own, I’m at peace, then I would be more atten – you know, feeling like I could sense someone more

There is a further mapping of the relationship between the familiar and the strange; as suggested, *emotional* responses also become routinised. But responses to events might also be subject to an ordinary, diffuse emotional volatility, a fluctuation of feelings. Ch suggests this might even go two-ways:

Ch: She’s [the ghost’s] probably always around, but it’s probably at some times she’s more – it could be anything, it could be to do with the day she died, the time she died, you know, or something significant, or – just at different times I sense her more. And it could be about myself as well. That maybe I’m more relaxed, or I’m more uptight, or I’m more – (CS2)

As described, people become physically and mentally 'submerged' within their everyday routines, habits and rituals of domesticity; events sometimes become labelled as uncanny when they create a jolt, they demand a sudden awareness. In order to live with such events, this relationship between awareness and forgetting needs to be negotiated; in order to be fully incorporated within the 'familiar', the uncanny must be something people become hardly aware of. This sometimes, ironically, seems to take conscious effort. RM in CS1 describes the way she deals with uncanny events by keeping them 'separate' in her head:

RM: I try to – rise above – I don't, I – keep them in a different – place in my head. If that makes any sense. To everyday living. And people don't understand that. And it's very hard for me to explain it. Because people, most people, if they've got a haunted house they, they are – actively interacting with the spooks. We're not. Not in that way

She separates the 'spooks' from everyday living; they are in the home, and yet they are not part of domestic life. This way she claims an ability to 'sort of forget about it':

RM: People think we must be obsessed, we must be, because it's happening all the time [pause]. But we're not. And – you can sort of forget about it, even though it's happening. If you see what I mean. No [laughs], I don't suppose you do!

R in CS4 also attempts a wilful *unawareness*, believing that if she *expects* an experience, she won't have one:

R: I think it's silly to go around looking for it. Then it'll stop

But, as described, the desire for some participants to look out is sometimes difficult to contain. For S in CS3, such behaviour has to do with the anticipation of events based on *where* they last occurred:

S: Often... if I come down at night to get a drink or whatever from the kitchen, or - I will sort of like look in here [the front room, where a ghost has been seen]. And if I'm on the loo in the middle of the night or whatever, and I look at the door. I don't expect to see them, I just think, 'Oh, are they there or aren't they there?' ... And sometimes if I'm

lying in bed at night when I'm here on my own, I look in the mirror and I think, 'Oh, I might see something go past the door'. But I don't. I don't see anything else

C: So you look out for them?

S: Yes, I do tend to look out. And sometimes I think, 'Oh, I'm so tired, I don't want to see anything tonight'

In contrast, in CS2, K's fervent desire – *not* to experience a ghost – fuels an attitude of willed forgetfulness and lack of enquiry. To think about the ghosts might be to 'invite' something to happen:

C: How would you feel about the staircase if you hadn't been fed all these stories?

K: Well, it's hard to know isn't it. It's sort of chicken and egg because that was from the very beginning, that was being said. So that affected my whole... it's more that I start to kind of become really interested in it. I mean, I think if I started to do that, then that's sort of inviting people to appear to me. And I just don't want to do that. I really don't

Having not had – and not wishing to have – an experience of the ghosts, K reacts to the *idea* of them. The same pattern occurs when people speak of the response of friends and family to their haunted home. Participants offer numerous examples of how family members have to be escorted to the bathroom, or refuse to be in the house alone. Those with less contact with the home, such as work colleagues, also express strong emotions such as fear or excitement at the *idea* of living with ghosts. Speaking of others' responses is a way in which inhabitants reinforce the difference between popular cultural notions of how it must feel to live in a haunted home, and the often rather more ordinary reality of the situation:

D: People used to say to me: 'I'm not coming in your house. I'm terrified to come in your house!'

C: But you weren't afraid?

D: No. No (CS8)

There is often a level of mockery, even one-upmanship, reinforcing inhabitants' own acceptance of and familiarity with the situation in contrast to outsiders' fears:

M: I was upstairs. And the husband of the next door was in the garden. And I was standing at the window. And quite suddenly he looked up. And I waved my hand. And

then he looked and looked and then he waved back. And then I went away. And after five seconds – or maybe ten – the telephone went. And I answered. And he said, ‘M, was it you who was at the window?’ And – a really very worried voice! And I still regret that. I should have said, ‘What do you mean? Which window?’ I was so honest. I said, ‘Yes, it was me. What did you expect? Did you expect the [ghostly] Pink Lady?’ [He was] very scared. I could hear it in his voice. He was really worried! (CS5)

The overlap between normal and strange, then, suggests the complex ways we register and relate to our familiar surroundings. Participants’ knowledge of their homes centres particularly on its *sounds*, and there is a need to distinguish between the ‘normal’ noises it makes and those that can’t so easily be ‘placed’. It is an intimate, embodied micro-knowledge of the home that allows sounds to be distinguished:

A: You can tell when it’s something not being done by the spirits really

V: Yeah, yeah, yeah. If it was wind or something, you know. Like the stair creaks. You know the difference between it just being a creak, as in like the central heating or the pipes underneath or whatever, or whether it’s actually creaking because there’s somebody walking, footsteps (CS9)

In CS11, a participant talks of her knowledge of her house:

H: I wander around without lights on. I know this house. I don’t put the lights on. Even if somebody needs something in the night. I don’t put the lights on. I wander around. I know exactly where the house is – where the steps are

C: Even then [after the uncanny event she has just described]?

[Pause]

H: It didn’t worry me in the least

B in CS10 is paid to look after the house where he lives. He has built up a very detailed knowledge:

C: Describe your relationship with the house

B: It’s extremely intimate. I know every corner of the house

He also performs his knowledge in a similar way to H in CS11:

B: I've had moments when I've walked through the house in the dark –

C: Why would you want to do that?

B: Well...I know this house. It's like a blind man would walk in the street and find his way

As the house's guardian charged with protecting it, B has to learn to account for all the house's sounds at night, to distinguish material and immaterial causes:

B: Two days ago I was in bed and I heard knocking. I think, 'What is that knock?' A loud knock. And I think, 'Is that a door in the flat? Is there a breeze blowing through a vent in the scullery? Or – and I think – and I get out of bed, and I check the door. And I know the sounds of the house. If I hear anything I kind of – work things out. I do calculations of what it is, think what it is. And then this thing, there's absolutely no reason. There's no accountable reason. There's no tree that managed to hit the house and make that knock. Which has happened in the past. I kind of know – what might cause sound in the house. And if there's something unexplained, then I'm not saying it was – I'm saying there could be some actual, physical reason for this happening... something I can't work out in the house, troubles me. Annoys me

Not pinpointing the cause is a great frustration, signalling a loss of control, a failure of role:

B: I don't like it, it keeps me awake. I get a bit annoyed with myself. Just thinking, 'What's going on?' You know

C: Because there's no logical explanation?

B: Nothing that I can work out. Nothing I can calculate. And it's not happening enough times for me to say, 'Ah!' So I'm walking backwards and forwards in the flat and I'm thinking, 'Where's that coming from?' And I can't work it out... If there's a ghost trying to make its presence felt, it troubles me a little bit. I think, 'What the hell – what am I going to do now? What does this mean? Is there something – stirring in the house?' Or – I like to know what is different about the house at this point which is making that sound. Whatever it is, I want to know what it is

The image of B, pacing up and down in his flat, trying without success to work out the reason for a noise, illustrates the compelling overlaps between strange and familiar in the haunted domestic interior.

Home Agency

If the experience of the uncanny is, or becomes, *almost* more familiar than strange for many people, it is the intangible gap between normal and not-normal which creates the uncanny effect; it is sometimes difficult to prise this gap apart to properly categorise phenomena. To that extent, the uncanny event, or the ghost (which may or may not be seen as the cause of, or *be*, the event itself) is defined as liminal experience. But this can also, as described, express an extension of the 'ordinary' uncanny of the domestic interior, and part of the way participants interpret this is by suggesting that the material space itself can be animated and given agency. Agency emerges through a sense of the home's creative potentiality. There are some examples where inhabitants wish to celebrate this waywardness and to let space 'be itself'. In CS2, P draws out the sense of danger in the unused spaces of her flat, where no one can claim ownership:

P: [Looking over the galleried hall, which reaches to the roof] It's very open, so you can see everything... this big sense of space. And it's quite dangerous. It's a bit scary, because you could easily [tips her upper body over the side of the banister, smiling] – like, go over. So there's a sense of danger

C: Do you like that?

P: Oh great! I like it. I really like that space

C: And the sense of danger?

P: Well, yeah. Because, it's a sense of – it's not all fixed. Things could happen... there's potential. The space here obviously is not ever used. It's air space. So I feel like – things can happen. [On the attic] down the other end, where the tank is, that's a bit unknown

C: You don't go that far?

P: No. Because that sort of goes into open space. So that's the unused space of the house

C: Does that bother you?

P: Well, it's strange, isn't it? That there's that big gap of space unused, strange. But I'm glad that there's a space that's not used in the house. The way they build flats now,

it's like every little bit of corner is used. You have – two children's bedrooms in that space if it was being built now. It's comforting that there's this – non-used space. Wasted space. It is kind of mysterious. It doesn't have to be exploited

A similar feeling is expressed by B, the caretaker in CS10, describing how the house and park/garden become more 'authentically' their 'own' when the public has gone:

C: When everybody goes home, and you're alone in the house, do you change at that point?

B: I do relax very much into the house, and I can enjoy the house. It's the same as the park. The gardens of the house. It loses its park, it loses its public facility. It becomes an energy, a force. It grows, it just becomes alive when people go away. It becomes – there's a magic about it, when people go away, it's wild. There's a wildness about it. Anything could happen, in a way

C: Is it like the public tames it?

B: It seems... to me... the personality, the character of the park, character of the space, is lost when the public are here. An aspect of the person. It's like, it's exposed, when the public are here. And then, in its privacy, the park, to me... it can be – it can be what it wants... It seems like the house is like that as well

What both participants celebrate is the possibility of space, its potential to be something else, to be unpredictable, animated, on its own terms. It is a celebration of the idea of insubordinate agency. 'Nature' here is not just something dangerous – something unruly that can't be contained – but also about 'being natural' – being authentically 'oneself'. It is also a twist on the idea of the 'uncanny' because to be truly oneself here suggests uncovering something hidden, unknown or private. Such a self must express identity and agency as a creative force. There is a sense of pristine, untrammelled nature, left to *be* rather than colonised, or which has the capacity to become *itself* afresh under the right conditions. The sense of a private, secret self is intimate with a sense of private, secret place, strongly echoing the ideas of Tuan (1977), Pallasmaa (1995), and other phenomenologists. For places to be 'authentic', in these examples, they need to be uninhabited or unused by people – the part of the attic no one goes, the grounds that lose their 'parkness' when the public go home. The complexity and noise of the social and public somehow masks the real 'self', which hides away, presents a different face offering less depth and revelation, covers up its innate nature. B in CS10 feels

privileged to witness the latter; it is a mark that he has become a true insider, a part of the house.

Participants also assume for the home a form of singular agency, which contains or holds its complexity, including the other agents within it:

B: In a way I don't feel it's just a house, a cold house of just bricks and mortar, wood and fabric. It's got a history, a life, a force, an energy... I feel its presence... It's a place where you can do things, create things, be allowed to do things. It's something to do with the fabric or architecture. The space may have a part to play, the design maybe of the room space. The placement of things (CS10)

B talks of the 'life... force... energy' of the house – it seems to actually live and breathe rather than exist *as if* it were animate. But it is also a practical, creative space; its energy can be utilised. And this, in turn, may relate to its physical features – the way things are 'placed', how the space is divided up.

One manifestation of a home's agency is what participants call its 'atmosphere' or 'vibe'. This can be good or bad, as if a house has a character that can be judged, and is in turn, judging. Such a character is a *felt* sensation – something which pervades all the material space and air between it, a kind of all-embracing background instigator of affect, marking out the distinctness of a place, echoing again humanistic ideas about place critiqued by Bondi (2005) and others:

C: How do you judge if you will be comfortable in a house you have bought?

RM: The vibes. I can walk into a house and say, 'That's it. I can't stand it'. Or, 'I like it'... I'm not threatened by [living in this haunted home]. And I don't know why I'm not threatened by it. Because I have been into other houses, when we have, you know, been trying to – buy houses in the past. I would walk in and I'd walk out again. 'I'm not having that, it spooked me'

A positive atmosphere does not preclude a belief that a house is haunted; in fact, a good atmosphere becomes especially important in such a place, allowing inhabitants to more easily accept and incorporate the uncanny aspects of their home. A vibe dictates whether inhabitants feel accepted or rejected. Uncanny events might be a part of the

house and emerge out of it, but they are subordinate to the underlying sense of the home as the dominant agent. The atmosphere or vibe is at the core of the home's identity:

R: It's got fabulous vibes. You know, when I was looking for my house for a year, I looked at cottages all over England. And some of them had awful vibes... My best friend... she was a very wise old lady... And she patted the walls and she said: 'Delicate, dear little cottage. Aren't you lovely.' And another friend, who's a farmer... I was showing him. He said: 'Good vibes. Good vibes'... We all love it (CS4)

It is this cottage, not the attached adjacent one (however domestic and orderly), which is associated with the ghost, suggesting the ghost itself has some hand in creating the home's character and vibe:

R: I call the rooms 'hers' [the ghost's] which are in one cottage, the first one I bought and came into. It was wonderful good vibes. The other cottage doesn't seem to be so influenced [by uncanny events], and it doesn't have nearly such good vibes either... My half's got the better vibes, yes, definitely

In CS3, S recalls her first impression of her home: a calm place, somewhere that would be a safe sanctuary. The sense of the interior as a 'private', bounded space is very marked. Despite this, there is something 'strange' in the atmosphere here too. But because the overriding feeling in the house is positive, strangeness is incorporated into the positivity – in fact, again, it is interpreted as a potential cause of the atmosphere, rather than being in tension with it. And the calm itself is uncanny:

S: We came up and looked at it... I fell in love with it and was determined that we were going to have the house. I just felt really sort of like calm, and safe, and didn't think anything would ever bother me here. But it was – it wasn't an eerie feeling, it was just like – I don't know how to describe it, really, it just felt really, really calm. And all my friends who come round say the same. They feel really calm as soon as they've gone through the door. I don't know how to describe it really – it's – when you came through it was just as though everything else had been switched off... that nothing that [public] side of the door mattered anymore. That it was all, gone. And everything was going to be all right. And everything was like calm

S described how there was something ‘strange’ about the house upon initial impression. She isn’t sure if this was due to a sense of presence or a feeling response to a particular set of objects left behind:

S: There was nothing, there was no wind flapping about or anything like that. But it felt like there was something. I don’t know. I got a strange feeling that there was someone here. And – whether it was because all the furniture was here when we came. It was all the original oak furniture... It was solid oak that was really, really old

S speculates that the initial ‘strange’ atmosphere was linked in part to a feeling of presence associated with old furniture left behind from the previous (now deceased) inhabitants. R in CS4 also connects the ‘vibe’ of the house with the materiality of the space. If atmosphere is related to how well furnishings reflect back the ‘character’ of the home, this is something she can change, control:

R: [resigned voice] When my mum dies, I will make that half of the cottage much more the way I would want it. Because I made it quite bourgeois, with her coming. And we gutted it and put fitted carpet in and all that. When she dies I’ll rip out that fitted carpet and I’ve got some old teak – I’ll put that down in the sitting room and – put a big Indian rug on it – Turkish rug and – stuff, you know. I’ll get the stupid, revolting, polyester quilt off my mum’s bed and put an ancient patchwork thing.... I haven’t been able to do what I want with it, not at all

Some participants talk of a home being empty of presence as a negative feature, stripping it of agency. There is ambiguity here whether the home is filled by its own atmosphere, or by that of other agencies contained within it:

Ch: Sometimes new houses don’t have anything, and then they can be very lonely and very –

P: Empty of spirit?

Ch: Empty, yes

K: [This flat] doesn’t feel empty. It doesn’t feel lonely. Honestly, I’ve spent days and days by myself, and, you know, loads of time without any extra contact, and I never really felt completely alone here. I never felt lonely... It’s been a really wonderful place for me to be ill in (CS2)

Some participants even express a sense that their home has power to *influence* them. It is not just a passive container or holding vessel, but part of a matrix of bodies, materialities and processes which influence each other: simultaneously to be contained by the home and to contribute to its form and content. At CS3, for example, friends like to just sit in the front room, choosing to be influenced by the atmosphere:

S: Two of my friends – they will come around here and sit here for the afternoon. They will often turn up and say, ‘Oh, can we just come and sit here and chill out for the afternoon?’ And they both said they feel really calm in here

S suggests that the ‘calm’ atmosphere is somehow connected to – even created by – the ghosts, a couple who had lived in the house for many decades, since it was built in the 1930s. She suggests their longevity together in the house creates a feeling of contentment, passed on to new inhabitants – a positive rendition, perhaps, of Marion Hirsch’s (1998) idea of ‘post-memory’:

C: The ghosts themselves are making you feel calm?

S: I think so. Yes. Maybe because that was their home they lived in basically from the day it was finished. The lady who owned the house, owned the one next door... and she rented them both out. And they actually bought the house from her about four years before we bought it. So they’d lived in it from day one

In CS1, RM has discovered creativity – the ability to make computer art. She is unsure if this is the result of being within the house:

RM: Whether that’s got anything to do with the house, or, um – I’m trying to think when I first started with that. Yes – it’s to do with the – maybe it’s to do with the house

RM recalls an incident when she felt a ‘presence’ behind her, guiding her hand as she experimented at the keyboard. She put this down to the ghost of the monk she had seen, and this led to a belief that she needed to be in the house to be creative. But latterly she has realised this is no longer the case:

RM: I felt a presence... behind me [touches her right shoulder with her left hand]... But I’ve lost my Dumbo’s feathers now... when it first started, I felt I needed to be in the

house to do my creative work because the monk was there. But I managed to do some very good work down in Eastbourne... Whatever I connected with – you see [laughs] I put it down to the activity in the house

To RM, the house, or the monk in the house, helps her discover her creative abilities. But now these have been realised, she doesn't need to be in the house to actualise them. She has grown in confidence enough to go beyond the confines of the home, to spread her wings.

The home's 'influence' is not always positive. P in CS2, whose relationship with her flat is troubled, recalls a bad first night:

P: It's such a lovely flat – but it hasn't been very lucky for me. I had a really bad first night in this flat, really horrible. My [ex-partner] just got up and left in the middle of the night, and I felt very uncomfortable. I felt very abandoned... You know, I thought, 'Well anyone would think this is a lovely flat'. But personally, at first it wasn't very lovely to me. It wasn't very kind

This is in striking contrast to flatmate K's relationship – a reminder that, although there is often consensus, people's emotional responses to a home can differ:

K: It's just my sense that this is somehow a healing, you know, accepting kind of house

The atmosphere becomes a permanent 'background' feeling exuded by the home, dictating levels of belonging possible for participants, despite or because of being haunted. Through its atmosphere the home's affective stance is transferred, communicated.

PART B: THE TEMPORALITIES OF THE HAUNTED HOME

Uncanny events also highlight for participants ways in which the home contains different dimensions of *time* as well as space. As described, this includes people's everyday experience of home and uncanny events over time, and the perceived potentiality of physical space itself. But the temporal complexities run deeper, although they still tend to be tied to the home as a *material* space. Conceptualisations of time are central to participants' ideas about their haunted home. The ghosts themselves are described as in a liminal 'in-between' time:

P: I don't know why [the ghosts] are there, what they're waiting for, what they're doing. There is a sense of waiting... I don't know what else they're doing... I don't feel like they're actively busy at something. So my mind goes to thinking that they're actually waiting. That's why they're on the stairs... It's in-between time (CS2)

Uncanny events themselves suggest a liminal point between past and future. Events are sometimes construed as 'memories' of the home and/or its ghosts, despite being unfathomable or 'surreal' because their meaning is unclear. The events are a way the home expresses its own past. The home may also be deemed to 'accept' inhabitants *over time*, and, in a simple equation, the amount of time in a home is seen to denote the level of attachment to it. The relationships and sometimes tensions between past and present, memory and history, continuity and change, offer inhabitants a wider context in which to interpret uncanny events, but also create a wider terrain of competing 'agencies' to negotiate. It is through uncanny events that the agency of the home – as the container of memories, 'inhabiting' its own history – is established and reinforced.

Old Homes

Popular cultural assumptions, as described in the introductory chapter, link haunted homes to the past and to a sense of attachment to place over time. Similarly, case study material is shot through with a deep-rooted belief that haunted homes are *old* houses:

P: It doesn't seem unusual at all that people [ghosts] should be living here, in this old house (CS2)

During her first viewing of her (very old) home, M (CS5) asks the previous owner if the house is haunted:

C: What prompted you to ask the question?

M: I think it was just an atmosphere. I think this kind of house could be a [haunted] one

This assumption is most obvious when it is challenged. In CS8, for example, the house was built only twenty years ago, and D expresses surprise that it should be haunted. A different explanation is sought, and she speculates about the previous usage of the land upon which the house is built; the house might not be old, but the ground must be.

A related belief is that ghosts are previous inhabitants. This assumes that people's attachment to their home is so strong that it continues after death. In CS8, D is particularly confused because she has been the house's sole tenant. This popular interpretation is summarised by Ch in CS2:

Ch: It's probably because that's where [the ghosts] may have – they may have died there, they may have been very happy there. You know, they didn't want to move on from that house, they can't move on for whatever reason

Knowledge of the previous inhabitant is sometimes gained through local folklore. In CS5 – the oldest house in the village – a story circulates about a female ghost, dubbed 'The Pink Lady':

L: I can tell you four people who came here and introduced me to the idea of this being a haunted house. And these were people – we have invited over to do something – be the electrician or plumber, or – who lived locally. And they would come and they would say, 'What a lovely house'. They always went through the same protocol. 'What a lovely house'. And I would say, 'Yes, an old house, it has all these curiosities'. And then there would be a pause and they would say, 'And yes, and having lived locally, we know something about it'. Or they would hint at that, and so would test if I knew anything or if I had – had witnessed anything – and then it turned out that they had heard – stories... circulating in this village. I think the Pink Lady – it's something in the village folklore. And people sort, if you like, in a light-hearted manner, accept this

There is an assumed equation between haunting, deep attachment, and length of stay. Here, the ghosts are more likely to be an elderly couple who had lived there for a 'long time' rather than the students who preceded the current residents:

M: I don't know if sometimes people have experiences soon after they've moved in somewhere, the previous occupant has made himself known

C: Is that what you thought?

M: Possibly. I mean before we moved some students were there. Before that an old couple had lived there for a long time I think (CS7)

...

P: [The ghosts] are strangers to me, but they are not strangers to the house (CS2)

Some *current* inhabitants also stress attachment through a sense of wider temporalities, recalling their first encounter or imagining their last:

R: I came down the lane and I just knew... there would be a 'for sale' sign and that would be the one... I just said out loud, 'I could be happy here'. And so, I bought it... And I'll probably be carried out of this little cottage foot first (CS4)

These narratives of attachment intermingle with those assumed of their ghosts to reinforce participants' place within a wider temporal and emotional lineage, being part of a past that predates their own relationship to home but within which they claim a place over time. The house's history becomes an important focus for deepening attachment, and a sense of connection to the ghosts helps to connect better with the home: the ghosts' attachment reinforces their own.

This feeling of attachment can play out ideals of 'home'. In CS4, the ghost (previous inhabitant, 'Annie') – and the inhabitant after her (now in a retirement home) – symbolise a sense of continuing lineage. The connections R makes concern an assumed sharing of a love of traditional country domestic pursuits, aesthetics and sensibilities. R has collected together scraps of evidence from disparate sources, her own historical research on the ghost, cottage and hamlet, and anecdotes and memories from friends and neighbours. In particular, she has been visited by a family group who had been evacuated to the house during the Second World War:

R: The evacuees said... this little room upstairs, which is now my bathroom, it wasn't then a bathroom. They called it the 'gold dust room' because it was full of fabrics and they'd disintegrated. But they'd had gold lace... [The ghost] just loved fabrics. The room was full of fabrics. They would have been her fabrics. I like fabrics and jams and I think Annie was like that too

The love of fabrics is also shared by the previous inhabitant, thus maintaining the link going back from R to Annie the ghost – an unbroken line through shared materialities of home:

R: She [the previous inhabitant] had, in her way, very good taste. She was a sort of sensation type, like me... And she had lovely fabrics. On the landing she had an old Paisley fabric. And I've actually - you know, I kept the landing curtains up for a long time

The overlapping of history and personal taste suggests ways in which R connects with the house as her home, beyond the fact of the ghost but linked to past habitation:

C: You're describing historical connections –

R: Yes, there are some

C: But also to do with your own likes and dislikes

R: They are. They are. It's funny that

History is personalised, making it into an intimately shared form of extended memory, part of a private sense of self and home. Her memories and the house's memories appear as a continuous narrative, and at the heart of it is an idealised notion of 'home' from her youth:

R: I need desperately to put down roots. I mean, a longing for roots, all my life... from my adolescence I longed for better roots than I had [she describes her background as nomadic, 'gypsy-Jewish']

C: Roots – meaning?

R: Oh, roots would mean to me hollyhocks in an English country garden. I wanted that thing of patchwork quilts and three-legged stools and hollyhocks. And I was only fifteen, sixteen. It means a lot to me

The previous inhabitants – in particular, the ghost – reinforce this ideal through particular rural domestic pursuits and aesthetics, adding ‘depth’ and authenticity to this project:

C: Would you prefer [the haunting] to stop?

R: [emphatic, shocked] No! Oh no, I think I prefer it to go on. Oh yes. Oh definitely

C: What’s the investment?

R: Ah! I’d love it to go on [pause]. It adds depth. To my life, my place, to my attachment to my own home. It adds depth

H in CS11 expresses the same sentiment, enjoying living in a haunted home because it adds ‘another dimension’. At the same time, she interprets the fact that the events seem to have stopped as a sign she has been ‘accepted’ in the house:

H: Well, it’s different – of course. It’s got another dimension to it. It’s good. It’s good [pause]. Because it hasn’t happened again. We are obviously accepted

Reinforcing Relationships

The feeling of attachment to home over time, described above – the ghosts afforded status for having a *longer* attachment than the current inhabitants – shifts in emphasis the longer the inhabitants themselves remain to increase their own sense of belonging. Sometimes the home itself seems to affirm this – M in CS7 believes that a house ‘reveals its secrets’ over time. Here, unlike CS11, acceptance is confirmed by an *increase* rather than a slowing down of uncanny activity:

M: Perhaps if you live in a house longer, it’s more inclined to reveal its secrets to you. It probably reveals its secrets to some people and not others

C: And do you think the house does hold secrets?

M: May have!

C: But not secrets you – discover?

M: It’s more abstract, yes

The memory of uncanny events, repeatedly retold over time, also reinforces relationships between *living* inhabitants. In CS2, three friends spent much of the group interview reminiscing about past houses and homes they had known – holiday houses, family homes, rented accommodation. The recall of strange and uncanny events serves to sharpen the memories and reinforce their friendship. The haunted home becomes a motif of shared experience:

P: We go back a long way, don't we?

Ch: We've done all these things

Some inhabitants described their homes using photographs which traced changes made earlier on. They presented their homes by visually guiding me through the process of change, which marked their growing sense of ownership and belonging. One participant revealed through this process how her memory of her home was tied up with her memories of her family. The photographs were of people as much as of rooms:

R: [Showing photos] Um, me and me [laughs]. My son helped at times. And kids coming and going. It needed to be gutted almost... There's my little girls, who were that age at the time. And did this, did that... There's my son sanding the beam, a very old beam, it goes right through the two cottages. And that's B the builder who first saw Annie the ghost. And look at what they did (CS4)

Elsewhere, a sense of attachment to home is less celebratory. D in CS8 describes how her own personal 'memories' are contained within the home and stop her from moving on, even though she doesn't like the rundown inner city neighbourhood she lives in:

D: As the years went by I used to think, 'Oh, I'd like to move. I'd like to move'. But there's something keeping me here. I don't know why. I would like to... have a complete change. And then you think, 'Well, all my memories are in the house, so there's something keeping me here too'. If I could pick the house up and move it somewhere in the country where I wanted it to be, I'd be fine

Her memories are 'in' the house, shackling her; she can't leave her own past behind. Memory is given agency – it is the 'something keeping me here'. It is not the fact that

the house is haunted that matters here. She is haunted by her own past in the house, which offers a sense of identity.

Over time, and as events become more distanced in the past, their memory takes on its own life. People's stories, as suggested, are open narratives filled with uncertainty and thus do lend themselves to repeated retelling. But these become 'fixed', they act as anchors of shared memory. As a researcher, I offered a semi-public form of focus for the enactment of this sharing. This is the case in CS11, where a dramatic event many years before is recalled in great detail as if it had only just happened. The dynamic between the two members of the household – an elderly couple – is reinforced as they take up their, by now, habitual stance. However lacking meaning in itself, the event is conferred meaning for becoming part of their shared past in the house. They disagree about what happened – one heard a loud, urgent whisper, the other heard someone ask a question; one heard a rustling skirt, the other didn't. They also disagree about the cause – one is bemused by it but disputes the other's belief in a supernatural cause. Their shared history of the event is contested, and this sharpens their separate memories, repeated in defence of their particular positions. This is an example of how the sensory experience is 'made sense' of over time, is given a coherent narrative – even in its very openness and uncertainty – and this becomes part of the enactment of their own relationship.

Re-imagining Domesticity

As described in Part A, some events suggest a repetition of particular routines. These can be romanticised as gestures of contentment; domesticity envisioned through the sensory engagement of an uncanny event can be a cosy affair. In CS5, for example, pleasant smells in the corner of the living room create an imagined scenario of a contented family at rest after a day's work:

M: You see, this is my favourite place. I love to read there [a chair in the corner where the smells occur]. And there is this [side] light. So I sit here very often in the evenings. Then, so I have the same experience very often because I used to sit there very much

C: Does it make you feel differently about that space?

M: Maybe it's only nice to know, ok – perhaps they have had a – rather nice life.

[Pause] Whoever has been here before, or have been here before. [With a warm, nostalgic smile] They are – I think it's very cosy if they are sitting here and drinking coffee and the men are smoking pipes. Nothing to worry about

There is a hint that the atmosphere of this spot influences M – it becomes a favourite place where she likes to read. Perhaps she imagines this cosiness as somehow emanating from its past use; or perhaps she imagines this as a cosy space for previous inhabitants, given this is her own experience of it. Again there is a sense of continuity of experience, shared domesticity, here an ideal of contentment, even if the activities differ in content. M's sense of this domestic routine of the past is reinforced by a material clue, which, for her, explains at least one of the smells she experiences – pipe smoke. The previous owners dug deep into the living room during repair work and discovered some 'small pipes':

M: You know those white porcelain pipes that were sometimes fashionable in the 19th century... I never thought about these pipes when I felt this smell thing. But now I can make a connection

There are historical facts to back up an uncanny event: the house has revealed something of itself, reinforcing the imagined scene.

In CS4, the ghost is still wearing her apron, and enjoying the aesthetics of domesticity – the look of jams, the view over the garden:

R: [The builder] saw – this is the kitchen sink that looks out down the back – and he saw this tiny little lady, at the kitchen sink, with a – they both [the builder and a friend, separately] said the exact same thing – a criss-cross apron at the back, you know, an apron criss-crossed over the back... There's the study window sill, looking out at the back... She was sort of looking at the jams, like that. And so it's the same way as looking out down the... big back garden

There is a continuity of pleasurable domesticity here – R makes jams, enjoys looking out over her back garden. This is reinforced by her knowledge of the past:

R: She was a fruit picker. Perhaps that's why she liked the different colours of the jams

There are further continuities, suggested by neighbours, creating a different kind of uncanny temporality: the person who is now a ghost is still remembered as being alive. In this case study, an old neighbour in the rural Wiltshire hamlet (CS4) remembers knowing the ghost as a woman, before her death in the early 1940s: 'he delivered logs to her when she was alive' (R). Elsewhere, in CS3, a neighbour verifies the description of the old man who used to live in the house, who had appeared as a ghost; she produces a photograph of him which corresponds to a recent sighting.

If the home has an 'influence' on inhabitants, this is often described in terms of legacies left from previous inhabitants. In examples already discussed, ghosts from the house's past are involved in creating certain states of being. The participant who described making her previous flat tidy recalls a further incident:

Ch: And we were laughing and laughing, making these Christmas puddings. We were having such fun, we were reminiscing about this, that and the other thing. And I remember thinking: 'Why are we doing...' – and as we were doing it, she kept saying, 'Why are we doing this?'

P: [Friend] A said that?

Ch: A. She said: 'This isn't us. This is like the spirit of the past that just had to make these puddings, and had to have this kind of ritual going on'. It was lovely. Because the reality was that at that time of the year – we made it very early to middle of November – and it was in the afternoon, on a Saturday afternoon, and that would have been the time that they would have been preparing for Christmas with the puddings. And... it was after the morning rush and they had had all the housework done, and that would have been the time

C: Did you think about this afterwards?

Ch: No, as we were doing it. We could sense that those people – that's what we were supposed to do (CS2)

Another flatmate carries with her an ideal of home which crystallises particular qualities lacking in her childhood home in Ireland, the latter which she described as an uncivilized and chaotic place. It is previous inhabitants who allow these ideal qualities to emerge:

K: From the minute I walked in here there's a really nice feeling, of elegant living or something. I just have this sense that people lived here in a civilised way... of people living harmoniously [pause]. That's suggestive of the way I'd like to live, I think. Which is calm and orderly and civilised... When I go back to my house in Tipperary... a sort of echo of misery for me can never leave that house. And I just feel that in some houses, flats, homes, that there's – that something does reverberate through time. I can accept that that's like leaving a footprint... There is an energetic resonance, is how I feel... I don't think of it in terms of how I will shape the character, for the future. But obviously if I believe that other people leave their resonance, then obviously I believe that mine will be left

Past-in-Present

The home is 'full' of character, a holding vessel which becomes the accumulation of its own content – the events and personalities of inhabitants past and present. It is a 'container' of memories, but something active, involved in the creation of its own future. In CS4, for example, R gives a sense of the enjoyment and level of ownership afforded by her uncovering the house's physical layers of history – but also of keeping some things hidden for future inhabitants to discover. There is a sense of the home as in dynamic relation with both past and future inhabitants; and of it being bigger than her, outlasting her, having a wider temporality, of lineage going forward:

R: And we found an awful lot of things... Elizabethan wood... like Tudor wood, going up the stairs. And behind the 30s fireplace – had to take all the plaster out. There was a big, great big fireplace, with a great big beam and all that. But I thought, well, somebody can discover that one day

The past of the house is its history as well as its ghosts, which are also the memories of the house, but not just 'memories' as in something necessarily in the past, reactivated or recalled in the present. The history, memories, ghosts cannot be separated. For many, they are part of a pantheistic vision of connection and accumulation, of the past continuously being added to in the present. These additions are somehow incorporated into what has gone before. The past isn't just a residue, but is active and alive. There is thus a slippage between the house's and inhabitants' energy and agency:

B: The house is the sum of many parts. It's the people as well. Its ghosts, its history, the memories. I want to add to that. I don't know if what will be added are more ghosts or more historical moments. History is a constant line through time. The memories, the energy of the ghosts, these are little snapshots... Everything is not lost, it's all recorded somewhere, and it is adding to the energy of the house and is accessible (CS10)

The ghosts, or uncanny events, might act as activations of history in the present; the materiality of the house too, its historic physical fabric, is equally 'accessible'. On the more ephemeral level, the house's atmospheres can be felt and sensed. But there is something else in this case study, about access to history having to be *granted* and being dependent upon levels of attachment. B becomes part of the temporal continuum, of the accumulation that makes the house what it is. This continuum has parts that cannot be easily separated – all creating the house's distinct 'energy' and character; nonetheless, the 'parts' are also distinct, and 'history' has to be appeased: B is aware of its 'weight' bearing down on the present. The house was once a place of importance. Its public history is 'weighty' in this sense:

B: It's very interesting historically. Lord mayors have lived here, masters of the royal mint, King Charles II, Samuel Pepys. Wesley preached here. Cromwellian leaders had it before Charles II. Back and forwards between the two sides. The house has never belonged to the one family. It's been fought over. There have been arguments to gain possession of this house. Words have been written [about it]. The Countess of L feared the house would fall down because of the weight of books

The weight of words written about the house, ideas which reinforce its historical myth, literally threaten at one point to destroy it. The house itself does not just contain its own history but becomes part of the history of London, a 'witness' on the city:

B: This house has been here a long time. Since the seventeenth century. It is like a witness, an eye on London, to the history... There have been great moments here. The house becomes a kind of time capsule, like a record

Such an illustrious past can be intimidating. It also gives B a sense that a foothold is possible because the house has never been owned by one family; there is no monopoly

but room for different forms of ownership, attachment and commitment. But B still feels he has to earn his place and constantly claim his right to be part of the house:

B: I am part of the line. I felt I should earn my keep by adding myself and my commitment. Being honourable... It was almost like testing myself to see whether I was accepted in the house – whether I was part of the house, in the history... I thought, 'I am part of the house. They've accepted me'... the history of the house... I'm carrying the baton of history. I'm part of the line... I have to stand up to history

The abstract and grandiose sense of the weighty 'history' of the house becomes alive in the ghosts. When he calls on a benign historical figure from the house's past to help him fight off a 'demon', as previously described, he is conscious that he is utilising his knowledge of the house's public history in a very personal, intimate way:

B: I sort of thought of A [a famous person from the seventeenth century] because she was the first, the most influential – well, one of the most influential people that has lived here

The ghosts and 'historical moments' are still 'alive' in the house: complex temporalities intermix with complex agencies. This past-in-present of the home – its ghosts, the uncanny events as surreal memories, and the historical materiality of many houses – continues as a narrative thread for many participants. But this dynamic does not preclude a more conventional, linear sense of time at work simultaneously, a sense that the past is the past, separate from the 'now'. One way in which this presents itself is through the ghosts, which are both still of and from, and possibly in, the past, and yet also have a 'presence' in the various sensual ways described in Part A. This is summed up by one inhabitant:

B: Maybe they can transcend time, they can visit different times, but are somehow from their own time as well (CS10)

S (CS3) believes that the former, now deceased, inhabitants of her home continue to be active, and yet is aware of material reminders of their own, very particular, past time in the house. There is a poignant image of the elderly couple painting around furniture they are too weak to move:

S: They'd obviously polished the floorboards at some time, and stained the floorboards, but done it round the furniture. Because when we lifted the carpet up, to get rid of it... they were quite elderly, what they'd done was literally just paint around it

The very particular domestic routines and habits of the couple's past also influence their presence as ghosts because there are clues left by the *material* remnants of their lives. The couple's son showed the house to prospective buyers before clearing it out after their deaths. When S interprets an experience of seeing the vague 'outline' of a human form by one of the back bedrooms, she assumes that this is the lady not the man partly because the bedroom contained a wardrobe full of women's clothes when she first viewed the house:

S: I've found out since that... the back bedroom – when we came to view the house, that had one of these chaise lounges, and all her clothes were in the wardrobe in the back room... all her clothes were still hanging up in the small back bedroom

There is an assumption that the back room was 'her' space, where she had her personal belongings and got dressed. S intuitively from this the woman's domestic routine.

Elsewhere, there is also a belief that the ghosts' own sense of time is not linear:

C: Do ghosts have a concept of time?

Ch: No. I don't think there's any sense of time. I wouldn't imagine there is. I think a lot of it could be ritual as well. Things that have happened at a certain time. And the ritual continues. But I think, yeah, they wouldn't have the sense of 'Oh next week, I want to do this', or 'last week I did that', or whatever (CS2)

The ghosts can't imagine past or future, they are locked into a loop of repeated moments originating in the past. Despite this sense of 'return', the suggestion that ghosts might be 'traumatised' – a very common cultural notion – came up surprisingly little in the interviews. Here is the only direct example, focusing on a disturbing place of trauma where liminal mental states as well as times might be the norm for the *living* as well as the dead:

P [works in mental health]: My feeling is, ghosts are where there is trauma... The old mental hospitals I think are cram-bam full of ghosts. I'm really sure of that. Of course, the reality of the situation is creepy enough – so I don't know where it overlaps – and people are living hardly in reality anyway. Maybe it's their ghost lives, they are half in the world and half not

The sense of different, coexisting non-linear time 'realities' is a common motif of many of the case studies: people don't seem to have a difficulty in theorising different forms of time. R in CS4 is open to the Jungian notion of the 'collective unconscious' which, she explains, is 'beyond time'. She also suggests 'time loops', states both dead and living people can enter and which can create a real, physiological response:

R: I don't think she [the ghost] chooses [to appear or not to appear]. It's a time thing, a loop. A very strong impression is made... I believe if it happens she's also going into a time loop

Another popular idea alluded to in both CS1 and CS7 is the 'Stone Tape Theory', whereby emotions or memories are somehow captured within stonework:

RM: I can buy that somehow we're connecting with something. I don't know how it works. But I can buy it

C: When you say, 'Connecting with something'?

RM: I don't know. Something from the past maybe (CS1)

...

M: It's a question of time, isn't it? I mean – I'm interested in the idea of people leaving imprints, which can be – ghosts

C: Imprints on places?

M: Imprints on places... There's also a question of time slips (CS7)

The materiality of the home speaks to current inhabitants of a continuing resonance of the past, which is inflected and interpreted in different ways. But the ghosts also grant people leeway to imagine the perception of 'time' differently, as well as differing levels of connection and belonging to place, offering a wider canvas of space and possibility.

Whilst uncanny time is often theorised by inhabitants as non-linear, the linear past as a different time/place to here/now is often simultaneously invoked and forms a rational bedrock from which to imagine the world otherwise. For some inhabitants, there is a *need* to keep the past at bay, to maintain its separation with the present. A focus on historical facts is one way of ignoring, or cancelling out, the possibility of active agents from the past continuing to be present. The historical past of the home becomes, instead, a tantalising place of *difference*, suggested in particular by imagining the physical hardships of previous eras:

H: Imagine how dusty it would have been, and how bad for the babies especially... They cleaned the wool, they carded it, they spun it. It must have been full of dust

A: They used to have to hawk the wool for ten, fifteen miles on donkeys

H: If they had donkeys (CS11)

...

R: And she lived alone. With no gas, water, electricity (CS4)

Some participants have carried out detailed research into the history of their homes, and sometimes their ghosts, although there is often a sense of defeatism, of the impossibility of knowing what causes the uncanny events:

D: It isn't a place with a history of that – sort... Nobody else knows anything about anything (CS1)

...

C: Did you ever wonder who the footsteps belonged to and look into the history of the house – to try to – make some kind of connection?

M: Well, I suppose I haven't. I didn't think it was possible to be sure, really (CS7)

But, equally, some participants seem *reluctant* to find out about the history of their home which might shed light on their ghosts, preferring not to know who they are. People's different relationships to historical knowledge suggest the varying ways in which they gain a sense of belonging to their homes: for some, this involves gaining more information; for others, about keeping things vague. In CS8, D hints she prefers to believe the land underneath her house was not a graveyard:

C: You said on the phone there might have been a graveyard here?

D: Yeah. Someone who's lived in the area a lot longer than me, when she was a child, she said it wasn't. She said there wasn't a graveyard

C: So who said that it was?

D: Yeah, a few people have said to me, just people locally have said to me, that was a graveyard. This girl, she said, 'No'. She said: 'I was born around that area. That was never a graveyard'. So I don't know. It might not be what was before this house, but what was before that again, because it's hundreds of years since it was a deer park

D prefers the explanation of one person – to whom she confers authority because of her long association with the area – rather than of others. Perhaps this is because of the rather sinister association in the popular media between graveyards 'disrupted' to build housing estates, echoing Kellner's (1995) analysis of horror films on this theme. D prefers a vague rather than specific explanation, despite her keen interest in local history.

In CS2, the issue is that hearing about the history of the house from a third party might make her own relationship with her home less personal:

C: Has the experience made you want to look into the local history?

P: It's amazing. I haven't. I'm almost quite scared to. I know that the bloke that owns the basement flat, Mr S, he's been attached to this house a long time... and he knows a lot of the recent history. Somehow I want my experience of this house to be – personal. I don't want any other – I don't want just to rely on S – I don't like S, the bloke who knows about this house. I don't really like him. And I don't want to be dependent on his interpretation... I'd like to know independently

P doesn't want to find out second-hand about the history of the house, or about the ghosts, believed to have inhabited it early in the twentieth century. The knowledgeable neighbour, in this case, is someone she doesn't like – a further reason not to 'depend on his interpretation'.

Change versus Continuity

As the above examples suggest, a negotiation is required between linear and non-linear ideas of time, between the past-in-present and the past-in-past. The deep attachment to place, and the way the past is embroiled in the haunted home, also suggests something more complex, more troubling. The past, as the caretaker suggests, needs to be appeased. Many ghosts are assumed to harbour a sense of ownership of their home: some uncanny events are interpreted as showing displeasure about change; or else they are created through the 'disturbance' of the house's fabric, a rupture to its body, which releases memories contained from its past. How people deal with this differs. For many, it is about trying to negotiate ownership whilst respecting the 'feelings' of the home's past and its ghosts. The different ways in which people retain their right to, and sense of, ownership, is explored in more detail in Chapter Four. For present purposes, these assumptions suggest the continuing 'presence' of the past in the haunted home as a key motif. Claims to ownership are temporal ones, signalling a tension or interplay between continuity and change within the home. For many participants the ghosts might pose a challenge to their own habitation whilst simultaneously positively reinforcing a wider sense of attachment.

In CS10, the past has to be accepted and respected in both its good and bad aspects. The house is personified:

B: I don't want the ghosts to leave. Whenever people come in – New Age people who've come in and tried to cast out spirits and want to clean the history, clean the energy up in the history – try to clean, clear, clear out, clear up the place of its energy, of maybe dynamics, you know. I just don't like that. Because I think they're erasing some of the past which is important to the house. I don't want to take away from the house anything of that, because I respect it. Whether it's good or bad. Whether it's dangerous or it's a horror – I'm just a part of that, of time, you know. And I'm good and bad, everyone has their good sides and bad sides. But I don't want to make everyone, I don't want to make everything clean and sweet and happy. I'm not interested in that. I'm interested in life – the capacity of life is not just good, and that's what makes it –

The relationship between continuity and change has a very *material* basis: it is about physical changes to the fabric of the home; about placing one's 'mark'. For some, they

are inhibited about making changes; but others assume changes will be accepted by the home/ghosts.

In CS2, respect for the past stops the flat's owner making changes:

P: [Walks into bathroom] You have the sense it's really old, and I don't want to interfere with it really. I mean, like, obviously, it's totally undone up, but it's very old, the tiles, I really like – they are genuinely ancient [laughs] – and I like that. And the basin is cracked, and you just think, 'Well, you know, haven't you got round to replacing it yet?' But I actually really like the oldness of it

C: Are you attracted to old things in general?

P: I do feel comfortable with old things. And I don't like disrupting things. You know, I have grand ideas about I'm going to do this, I'm going to change things, but actually when it comes to it, I hate to rip, rip, rip up! And [pulls a face]... And I also wonder how I'm fearful of changing things. Getting it wrong, actually [pause]. Making a mistake. And, er, destroying something that – has value and has history. And also, I hate this culture of making over and tarding up and doing new things everywhere, ripping places apart, when actually there's absolutely no point to it

In many cases, building work does seem to herald the start of uncanny events. This is construed both negatively, as the ghosts' anxiety or annoyance, and positively, a sign of a benign curiosity:

S: She's [the female ghost's] probably going to be about a lot if she's going to be, because after Christmas we're starting on the two back bedrooms... This year obviously we started on the kitchen, and they've got more active again

C: You made a little joke about how you hope they'll like the changes that you make –

S: Mmm

C: Also the fact that they seem to appear more when there's work being done. What do you make of that?

S: I just think they – are curious to what is going on. If they've lived there and they suddenly think: 'Oh! Something's happening there, something's changing' –

C: Would they be concerned?

S: I don't know. I would think, I would hope, that they would think, 'Oh, they're updating or doing what they want to do there'. You know, like they did, perhaps. You

know? They've changed things obviously from when probably the house was built, like the floorboards, or a bit of decoration, and things. And that's all going to be changed. And I just think, hope, they're fine with what we've done. And understand it (CS3)

There is no overt tension between continuity and change. S doesn't tip-toe around the home's old materiality. Here S describes children playing with old curtains – the viscosity of the home's crumbling past becoming part of a playful, disruptive, fascination:

S: [Show's photograph] That's the bigger back bedroom, with the curtains. And every time you touched them, they shredded. It was so old. My cousin came round to help us do something, and he brought his two children, and they had great delight putting their fingers through the curtains

S puts her own mark on the house, claims ownership. For her, the home is significant because it is her first move beyond her parents' house. Through making it 'her own', she creates her new life; the fact that it is her boyfriend, a builder, who is carrying out the renovations perhaps reinforces the symbolic importance of this. S believes the previous owners check in to see what is happening, but prefers a positive interpretation. She imbues the ghosts with a kindly empathy, accepting changes to the house with open-minded curiosity, as well as accepting differences in taste (one example being that the previous owners hated cats, according to the neighbour, and S owns cats). But there is a tussle between what she 'thinks' or knows, and what she 'hopes', suggesting some lingering doubts. Perhaps for this reason keeping a record becomes more important. She may have hated the old wallpaper and rushed to strip it off, but she keeps a sample of it in a scrapbook. The scrapbook acts as a memory of the process of change, reinforcing S's ownership whilst at the same time memorialising and revelling in the house's previous materiality. The wallpaper becomes a scrap standing in for the whole, from a different time, now out of place. The past, in this way, is contained and rendered powerless, whilst also being respected and kept alive. This way she appeases the old house gods – the ghosts who chose the wallpaper, the house itself. But there is more respect for the past, and a concern to appease it, than S makes out. In particular, she finds a little plastic cat on a window sill. Her mother told her of a superstition that dictated that anything found left by previous owners mustn't be removed from the house:

S: There's the little cat, there... I tend to leave it there

C: Is that exactly the place where you found it?

S: Yes

Given the previous inhabitants disliked cats it is a strange artefact to leave behind.

Perhaps the fact that S keeps cats increases its resonance: a gift from the old owners to the new, and a signal of their acceptance of change through an unobtrusive token of continuity.

In CS4, there is a similar belief about changes triggering the start of a recurring event of pictures left aslant on the walls:

R: Four years ago I had a new greenhouse. The old one was smashed to the ground. [Shows photo] You can see how big it is. Sixteen feet long. And they had a skip. And they were thundering backwards and forwards over the back windows... with the stuff for the skip. And that's when the pictures started going. And I think she just doesn't like skips and upheaval and building

R admits the ghost might be concerned about changes, the uncanny events signs of disapproval:

R: Why should it [the paintings] always be on a slant? I just don't get it. I just sometimes feel that, you know, when I'm out, she goes round, and if she doesn't like something that's going on a bit, in the house, she goes round and moves – just brushes the pictures... But what she doesn't like, I think, is – upheaval. You see, B was there as a builder. And I wasn't there. My friends [one of whom saw the ghost] were staying, and I wasn't there. So there would have been a bit of change. I don't think she likes change... My mum's talked to her. She said: 'Anne, don't worry' – I think once we came in and the pictures were everywhere – 'Anne, don't worry, it's all right. No one's going to hurt your house'. My mum said it so nicely. I said: 'Look at that picture, mummy. You know. It's ridiculous'. She said: 'Annie, stop worrying. It's alright'. It was so sweet. 'Don't worry. Nobody's going to disturb your lovely house'

R comforts herself by her belief that the ghost would *like* the changes being made – they are in keeping with the house’s past, although again there is room for a hint of doubt between ‘thinking’ and (emphatically) ‘knowing’:

R: I don't think I'd do anything that she wouldn't like. [Pause] I know I wouldn't. I know I wouldn't. You see, I know that for a fact. Ah. Now I'm sounding very flaky! No, it's true though. She would be pleased. Because these four windows I'm having rat's tail handles, you know, and proper casements. None of your plastic. I think she'll like it

Change is also recast as respect for the house, granting it a new lease of life whilst returning it to a ‘pristine’ state:

R: This was three hundred years old and in a bad way. And then this is all lovely when it's all completely pristine and tip top

The ghost, ‘Annie’, is given particular status because of the longevity of her attachment to her home: she was born and lived in the house for 88 years, ‘was head of the household when she was 38’. There is a further tension between continuity and change: the ghost was the last in a very long family line (even a local lane is named after the family). Annie died alone and childless, having outlived her many siblings. There is a severing of continuity at the point of her death. Annie, as a ghost, demands her memory – and that of her family – is kept fresh. Becoming a ghost is an act of continuity, defiance against the rupture of new ownership.

In CS11, there is also an assumption that the ghosts are previous inhabitants, who are also disturbed by material change. Even avowed sceptic A slipped this suggestion into the conversation on a couple of occasions:

A: This house was sort of renovated, what – three, four years before we came into it. So I suspect that any thing or any body or any – had been disturbed before we arrived. If you like. If these things exist... If the fellow who renovated upset someone, but we were here three years later. So I would have thought after three years it would have settled down

A is loathe to offer agency to the ghost – note the uncertainty of the use of ‘thing’ and ‘body’, and the slippage between ‘someone’ and ‘it’. But what A omits to mention here is that they *did* carry out some work early on, which is also when they experienced uncanny events. Again, there is oscillation between events as complaints and a more accepting interpretation:

H: Oh, they just came to check on us

A: But it's been settled for 20 years

H: Touch wood

C: So it's like someone saying –

H: Objecting

For B in CS10, changes made to the house – in particular, the creation of a private caretaker's flat within it – only serve to decrease his sense of ownership, since this is of little consequence to a house that has been altered numerous times and yet retains a singular strength of character:

B: I'm part of the house. Locking the door doesn't do anything. Alarming the house doesn't do anything. Locking all the gates. So I'm aware of it all the time

C: [The flat is] a sectioned off area, but still part of the house?

B: In a sense, there's – through time, the house has changed. The walls have been moved, they have been raised, they have been taken down. Doors have appeared, disappeared, through time. People have walked through doors at one point in history, now they don't walk through them. Or they would walk still through them doors, although they don't exist any more. So they actually in this time – in their own time they're still operating. Yet in an older fabric

C: So to separate your section from the rest of the house –

B: It's irrelevant. It could be the heart of the house

Here the house itself seems to poke fun at any attempt at privacy, of creating a separate space which leaves the rest of the house intact; the past is always present, and can withstand any change to the house's fabric, any attempt to carve up the house in different ways.

CONCLUSION

This chapter reinforces and extends a definition of ‘home’ which emphasises its material and immaterial components, here within the confined spaces of the domestic interior; the intersection between the physical fabric, objects, furnishings, and material processes and practices of home, and the uncanny events, as well as witnesses’ responses to them.

Uncanny events speak of an *excessive* materiality, as described by Dewsbury et al. (2002) and others. Here ‘excess’ refers to the defying of laws of material causation and spatial scale: often tantalisingly not-quite-material, not-quite here and now, unable to be contained or catalogued. But case study descriptions also reinforce an understanding of the uncanny suggested by Holloway, Kneale (2008) and Pile (2005) as something intrinsically linked to physical materiality; events emerge through the specific material spaces of home, mirroring domestic noises, smells and processes in banal ways. Sometimes events manifest in intimate ways – bodies which aren’t quite there seem to press on, weigh upon, mark, the bodies of participants, have a physical impact on the surface of skin. At other times, events are just out of sight, out of reach, out of physical and mental grasp. Uncanny events, it might be assumed, might also disrupt the home in a real, ‘material’ sense – and there are certainly examples of this. But even when this happens, they tend to be short-lived, with few exceptions. In many cases, they make no mark upon the physical fabric at all; they are immaterial in the sense that they ape domestic processes without apparent material effect. Uncanny experiences both reinforce and disturb a Derridean critique of ‘presence’. Presence has a double meaning in the experience of the uncanny: it is something that constantly eludes grasp, and yet is still palpably ‘there’.

My focus on the domestic interior extends Shove’s interest in the ‘routinized and inconspicuous practices’ of home (Shove, 2003: 2-3). It highlights ways in which what counts for ‘everyday’ experience contains and expresses emotional and mental states which oscillate between awareness and submergence within the habitual rituals of home-making practices outlined by Young (2005) and Casey (in Young, 2005). One might expect that uncanny events would disrupt participants’ submergence in domestic practices, jarring the familiarity of domestic routines, demanding a full alertness, a constant edgy awareness. This would back up popular ideas about the haunted home as

an aberration, an example of how ideals of domesticity fail or were already suspect; as an icon and popular cultural motif, the haunted home is assumed to be a place of terror.

Surprisingly, perhaps, this is not usually the case. Certainly, there is a particular focus, an awareness of events and where they occurred, and a reverberating after-life in the memory, in contrast to the usually short-lived nature of the experience itself. Uncanny events do influence the way some people respond to and inhabit their homes, but often only in subtle ways. For the most part, events are incorporated into ordinary processes, not fully or completed, but at least often in ways which suggest that the uncanny can (almost) become the familiar. The emotional effect for the most part is subtle rather than extreme. Uncanny events rarely live up to the haunted home's association with extreme fear and confusion.

Responses to uncanny events sometimes even mirror ordinary responses to 'everyday' domestic processes. 'Experience' is not just about witnessing events, but also about an accumulation of knowledge, understanding and familiarity about them. Participants become 'experienced' in experiencing the uncanny and often learn to take events in their stride. Events are granted their own special level or type of normality, even though they remain outside normal categories. They are also sometimes experienced as uncertain because of their intimacy as part of the sensory terrain of the home, expressed as a difficulty in distinguishing between uncanny and normal processes at an immediate, physical level. Not only do they arise out of the midst of everyday life, but they are negotiated as part of the ordinary routines of home. Far from suggesting any gaping polarity, the strange, supernatural or anomalous cannot easily be separated from the familiar, ordinary and domestic. For some, however, there is a relationship between the uncanny and domestic dis/order. An 'orderly' home is seen as a foil to the uncanny, which is associated (sometimes rightly) with mess, chaos, and an unruly form of nature 'out of place'. An orderly home can also highlight uncanny events; there is less likelihood of mistaking them for ordinary ones. But perhaps more often, the uncanny seems to more easily be granted its own level of familiarity because, as Kaika (2004) and others describe, the home is ordinarily a complex, noisy, untidy place: to varying degrees, and at least metaphorically, it is already uncanny, and perhaps this is why separating what is 'genuinely' uncanny from ordinary material processes is not always easy. For some participants, the task of doing so requires effort; but for others, it

reinforces a very intimate knowledge of home as an auditory as well as physical space, contributing to an existing sense of familiarity and being ‘at home’ within it.

A focus on the interior also by definition suggests fixed boundaries demarcating it from the outside world, an idea which has been extensively critiqued. At the same time, the often ephemeral nature of uncanny events, and the cultural idea of the ghost as something which defies boundaries and is itself porous, illuminates a definition of the domestic interior as fluid and dynamic. The interplay between boundaries/containment and fluidity/porosity became a central theme in participants’ descriptions. A further repeated motif of case studies – a belief in the liminal nature of ghosts and the experience of the liminal spaces they occupy – illustrates the already-complex nature of certain boundaries, and how these are both reinforced and circumvented by participants.

Part B continued the themes of materiality and liminality to explore the haunted home’s temporal complexity. Boundaries, again, are both fixed and disturbed. The home becomes active or ‘alive’ with ghosts; they *become* the home’s memories but are also separate from them. The idea of memories being ‘contained’ or ‘recorded’ in specific places – in turn being hidden or revealed – suggests a need to set boundaries between inside and outside, and subject and object, as a benchmark for interpreting the haunted home, however much such boundaries are also unsettled within it.

Responses to anomalous events do reinforce the ubiquity of narratives of the past – of history and memory – in the way in which people interpret living in haunted homes; in particular, the age of the house and the fact of previous habitation are often both taken for granted as cultural norms. People describe the way the past continues to impinge upon, or function within, the present, and this is, again, often played out through the *materialities* of the home. Objects and furnishings left over or inherited from the house’s past still have an active ‘presence’. Similarly, uncanny events and ghosts are not just memories in the sense of being a replay of the past *from* the past.

This ‘bending’ of time into multiple shapes, however, takes place simultaneously within or alongside a more conventional, linear narrative of time. The past is still ‘different’ to the present; past lives lived within the same home are different to present lives. There remains, for many, a tantalising gap between past and present that cannot be bridged: the past is ‘other’, an intrinsically foreign part of the domestic. The simultaneous

mixing of different accounts of temporality is a central way in which the ‘uncanny’ becomes both strange and familiar.

The importance of the past as a central motif of the haunted home, then, often presents itself as a form of active, if surreal, form of memory, suggesting multiple agencies at work within the home beyond and including participants’ own. Responses to this differ depending on context. For some, there is an acceptance or enjoyment of complex temporal processes because these reinforce and widen a feeling of connection and belonging to the home. For others, there is a tension between continuity and change, as the agencies of the past must be subdued or pacified, although rarely are people actually inhibited in making physical changes to their homes. Adding complexity to the idea of the haunted home as a familiar place is the fact that the ghost (when commonly perceived as a previous inhabitant) might be deemed to be *more* familiar with the home; its relationship with it will certainly always be the longer. In general, however, Miller (2001) is incorrect to automatically assume a difficulty in such circumstances in ‘making home’, although the process is clearly an uneasy one for some. Again, the very *materiality* of the past is the focus; the way such materialities play out relationships with home – sometimes actively reinforcing specific ‘ideals’ of home, other times having to be somewhat tweaked to reflect a sense of self-at-home.

The spatial and temporal intermingle; this is at heart a sensual process. Underlying it is the impossibility of separating the ghosts, the house’s history, current inhabitants, and their own developing memories of home, all of which have to be accommodated because they collectively make the house what it is. In particular, the home itself is often granted its own unique agency. Being ‘home’ to the past and to past inhabitants means that a sense of ‘home’ must be shared rather than be a singular resting place for or expression of individual subjectivity. Again, at times, this acknowledgement of collective use and belonging, of the intermingling of a plurality of agencies from past and present, is expressed as competition and struggle for space and ownership; at other times, there is a more pantheistic vision of connection and cooperation, and of the richness and fascination afforded by such multi-faceted engagements and encounters.

The sensuality of the temporal uncanny of the haunted home plays well with theories of ‘embodied’ or ‘affect memory’. But people’s descriptions also do suggest a double meaning for ‘sense’: referring to the act of ‘making meaning’ (making sense) as much

as the fact that the events are *sensory*. This suggests that there is a further dynamic to the relationship between past and present in the way participants experience the uncanny. As Ahmed (2004) argues, however much sensations are immediate and visceral, they are also already represented, loaded with past understandings, memories and beliefs even at the moment of encounter. This is given specificity within the haunted home over time, as participants develop their own relationship and response to the types of phenomena they experience. Uncanny events also become participants' memories which contribute to sense-making narratives. Events might be 'meaningless' or surreal in themselves, but they are often granted meaning through being described, reinforcing or creating relationships between householders, and, in particular, with the home.

Such narratives, then, navigate the surface of complex and intimate exchanges between home and householders on a sensual plane where different kinds of bodies emerge, merge and separate. Uncanny events are the house's own memories expressed through its fabric, through the rituals of domestic life, and the intermingling of the haunted home's pasts and presents. The 'secrets' the home reveals cannot be known in any rational sense, and yet there is clearly an assumption that something is obliquely being exchanged. The following chapter will focus on the strategies people employ to co-habit with ghosts; as has been shown, in order to do so successfully, one must first feel accepted by the home itself.

CHAPTER FOUR: STRATEGIES OF CO-HABITATION

This chapter explores how people – how *far* people – manage to co-habit with ghosts. In Chapter Three, I examined participants’ relationships to their haunted home as both a material and immaterial set of spaces and times, and how uncanny events are inflected within the domestic routines of everyday life. In this chapter I focus on the figure of the ghost as a ‘co-habitee’. I explore the different ways in which participants negotiate space for themselves in the face of the ghostly ‘other’ within the home. The experiential insights set out below contribute to the issue of conceptualising the self-other relationship, as well as continuing to examine interconnections between self and home. The first part of this chapter explores the ways in which participants describe and define their ‘ghosts’. The second part looks more broadly at the main thematic categories emerging from an examination of the different ways in which participants interpret their co-habitation. The last part offers examples of how these relationships play out within particular situated contexts, focusing in turn on the experiences of four individual participants.

PART A: EMBODYING, DOMESTICATING THE GHOSTS

The Ghost as Personhood

Participants respond differently to the problem of defining uncanny events. For some, they remain just that – vague happenings or occurrences. For others, they are a manifestation of ghosts, presences, spirits or spooks. The use of these terms is important for the way inhabitants characterise their co-habitation, but they tend to be used in different ways, depending on context and belief. As expected, seeing a ghost distinctly lends itself to the most clear-cut description of the ghost as a somewhat, or almost, ‘normal’ human person:

S: I saw him recently, yeah, when I was in the kitchen... He was a person, yeah.

Definitely (CS3)

...

RM: I saw a monk walking... I just saw a flesh and blood monk... And there was a girl dressed in a long sort of blue cloak. And she was bent down, stroking the cat... I didn't take any notice of it – I mean I wasn't thinking 'spook'. She and the cat – dematerialised, and there's nowhere she could have gone (CS1)

More often, there is uncertainty. Here R in CS4 is aware that the label she gives to her 'ghost' is tentative in relation to her personal experience:

R: I call her a ghost, but I have never seen her

But at another point, she uses the word 'spirit', and speaks of it as being 'alive', suggesting she imagines a vivid form of agency:

R: [I find it] almost heartening to know there is a spirit alive in this house

At times, uncanny 'beings' are positioned as *less* than human, and at other times, *more* than human. For some, ghosts are automatically conferred supernatural, or 'spiritual' powers. These can be protective, or threatening. Here K and P in CS2 agree:

K: I suppose... If there really are ghosts here... then even if I talked about them a hundred miles away they would hear me anyway

P: Yes, I share that

K: – spiritually they would hear me wherever

But P is vague, calling the ghosts the 'people who live here', and at another point: 'The people, spirits, whatever', suggesting a struggle to categorise them. She rejects the term 'ghost' because, although they are not quite 'real, fleshy people', her ghosts seem rather 'ordinary'. What 'ghost' implies to her is something culturally specific – something both 'silly' and also strange. Above all, she wants to cultivate their normality, in line with the emphasis on the familiarity of the uncanny described in Chapter Three. Considering the ghosts as 'people' is a way of maintaining them as part of the ordinary domestic:

P: I'll dodge around the word 'ghost', because I find it a bit, a bit silly

C: Why is that?

P: Well, it sounds so mysterious – when I don't think they're very mysterious. But then obviously they're not strong, real, fleshy – people... I actually do feel a very ordinary presence of those ghosts. And it is extremely ordinary. It doesn't seem unusual at all that people should be living here

P is not alone in her struggle to articulate a definition of 'ghost', and this also involves a difficulty in thinking beyond the idea of the human. It is not easy to talk of things which exceed normal categories; the tendency is to make them even more ordinary. Perhaps this helps to maintain an 'ordinary' response to them, an affected nonchalance (P goes on to say: 'I'm hardly curious about them').

Elsewhere, in CS13, when I asked a gardener if he believed the house contained ghosts, he corrected me:

They are not ghosts, they are spirits... I don't know what ghosts are. This place is full of spirit energy... healing energy... You'll feel it if you're sensitive to it

But whether the ghosts are given more-than or less-than human characteristics (or the category 'ghost' is rejected in favour of 'spirit', with its religious or New Age connotations) – in most cases it is *human beingness* which remains a central benchmark of definition. As described in Chapter Three, the gap between what is normal and what is not can be tantalisingly narrow. Ghosts can be *like* humans, or *as if* they are still alive; participants keenly sense a difference, but they don't quite know, or can't articulate, what it is. But the drive seems in most cases to define the ghost as something as 'normal' as possible – as a person rather than an unknown 'other' – and this requires that the 'other' becomes more like the 'self'. The repeated default position is to assume the ghost is more familiar than strange. A primary way in which ghosts are granted personhood is through a belief that human personality persists after death, particularly when the ghosts were known when alive, such as family members. In such cases, it is not just personalities, but often family dynamics and social relations that continue.

Ghosts can, as described, appear as if they are 'flesh and blood' people, but this is uncommon. Auditory events – footsteps or vocalisation such as whispers and name-

calling – might *suggest* a human source. But even indistinct events are sometimes explained in such terms. How are such ‘others’ which are similar to ‘us’ defined or described? How do people deal with aspects of the ‘other’ which cannot be collapsed into the ‘self’? In what follows, I describe two contrasting presentations: a case study where the person of the ghost is taken for granted, and one where personhood is denied. In the first example, what is important is that the ghosts, although different to the householders in many ways, share a similar attitude. In the second, the possibility of agency is dealt with by denying the ghosts certain features which might render them uncomfortably *too* human.

The ghosts are not orthodox

In CS2, the ghosts are assumed to be like humans. Three ghosts are connected by family relationship – a mother, father and daughter: a social dynamic within the existing dynamic of the three living householders, who talk about the ghosts *as if* they were alive. A striking aspect of Ch’s description of the ghosts is the level of detail she is able to offer, as a ‘sensitive’ who has had many supernatural experiences. She situates the ghosts in their historical ‘time’, describing their dress as of their age, trade and cultural group. In particular, the men are dressed as tailors. As described in Chapter Three, Ch also assumes they are present in the ‘here and now’. There is a continuity of cultural and social relationship; the ghost’s post-death personhoods are defined by the circumstances of their lives. Their central characteristic is their being of Jewish heritage. The clues to this are three-fold: the householders know from the neighbour in the basement flat that the house has been a ‘Jewish’ house; more generally, that the neighbourhood is ‘Jewish’, more so at the time the ghosts are assumed to have lived in the house, during the early twentieth century. Lastly, there is material evidence in the form of *mazuzot*, encased Jewish prayers nailed onto doorframes, which remain.

But if the ghosts are conventionally ‘constructed’ to fit their appropriate social context, there is a striking addition to the narrative which suggests a strategic move to limit difference. The ‘otherness’ that matters is not the fact that they are ghosts, from a different era and culture, or of a different religion to the householders. Nor does it seem to matter that the ghost family conforms to the conventional heteronormative type, in contrast to the participants (two of whom define themselves as bisexual). What matters

is the *attitude* towards difference assumed for the ghosts themselves, how accepting of difference the *ghosts* are. The way participants reveal this is to fixate on the form the ghosts' Jewishness takes. The critical issue is the level of the ghosts' religious observance, in particular, how far they were/are *orthodox* Jews. The participants are adamant that they are *not* orthodox, suggesting a desire to share enough cultural and social values to allow participants and ghosts to co-habit harmoniously. This is particularly important because participants' modern, independent lives and liberal beliefs might place them at loggerheads with the assumed 'repressive' intolerance of traditional religion:

K: They are not orthodox. Even though I know I don't know – I'm absolutely sure

...

P: I think they are not orthodox. I wouldn't want to be living in an orthodox house! It just seems repressive and dreadful

Difference is only allowed within certain bounds. The level of 'otherness' must not pose a threat to the status quo of the co-habitation; the current inhabitants do not want to feel judged by the ghosts. The personhoods that make up the ghosts are thus, to an extent, denied some agency as they have to conform to certain 'rules'.

The ghosts don't feel

A more determined limitation on agency is at play in CS1, where the ghosts are denied *feelings*. This is despite three ghosts having been seen, and their immaterial bodies thus 'fleshed out' in the most straight-forward interpretation; eye contact is even, unusually, made with one. But the narrative insists that no real engagement is possible. RM strips them of any human characteristics which might cause them to infringe on the 'private' spaces of home. The ghosts are denied their own emotional interiority. I ask RM about her relationship to privacy in a home full of ghosts. She reacts flippantly at first, with a joke:

RM: Oh well, they've seen it all before, haven't they! [Laughs]

C: Some people feel they have to – distance themselves a bit from whatever is – it's their home, their private space

RM: Hey, that would be a good one for fending my mother off. Because when we had a parrot, we had it in the bathroom... And she used to put a towel over it when she went to the bathroom! [Laughs] I'll say, 'Mum, the spooks might be watching you!'... It had never occurred to me. Because I don't sort of think of them quite on that – really think of them, not really like that. Because, I – it's really hard to explain... I don't really think of them as people [emphatic pause]. They are spooks. And they're sort of like – well, I don't think of them as human beings. Like, maybe like – pets? [Pause. She smiles in a defeated way] – Robots. Or something. They're not human beings. With feelings. Possibly... no, I don't think about them on that sort of level... No. I wouldn't mind if the cat walked into the bathroom. Or the spider sitting there... and I'm in the altogether. That wouldn't worry me. And so, I think, that's the same. It would be on that sort of level I should think... Although I talk about them as if they were human beings... I don't think of them as human beings. No. I know they look like human beings

The ghosts don't 'feel' so you can be in the bathroom or naked and wouldn't feel 'watched' in the sense of something responding like you might. So the focus here is on difference not as something which creates fear but which allows for personal space. The otherness, the difference, is something diminished – the ghost becomes like an animal, a parrot, spider, cat: something assumed to have limited emotional vocabulary, that doesn't pose a threat because it is a less-than human thing. This is a striking belittlement of something unpredictable, of 'human' appearance, and of unknown cause. Ghosts are domesticated; they are slotted into the same category as house pets, part of the domestic scene. They find themselves compared to, and placed within, the very ordinary and very familiar. By denying them humanness, RM is also containing their uncanny aspect.

Naming and Humour

The above examples suggest ways in which ghosts are ascribed personhoods, and how this is limited. There are different *strategic* responses to co-habiting with 'others', suggesting that, in many cases, there is a certain leeway to interpret ghost identity in ways which suit inhabitants, in particular by containing agency or modifying difference – 'domesticating' the ghost. Other ways of doing this include humour and naming. The act of naming takes away the ghost's mystery, which is part of its power. The way

naming takes place is also important, in particular, if by doing so the ghost can be infantilised or, in the case of a male ghost, emasculated.

Participants in CS1, described above, refuse to allow ghosts human feelings. And yet, they continue to name the ghosts in a tone suggesting amused belittlement. Here, the husband D – an arch cynic who refuses to ‘believe’ the ghosts are singular entities – is happy to accept that he is being ‘strategic’:

D: And so we make jokes about the spooks and what they’re doing, give them names, and say silly things about them

C: And that’s a strategy, is it? Or sort of bridging the gap between –

D: [Laughs loudly] Yes, it probably is

His wife, RM, also plays down the anomalous events, defining the act of naming ghosts as no more than the personifying of inanimate objects:

RM: I don’t think of them [as persons] – although I talk about them as if they were human beings. I’ve given them names, and that’s more for – fun? Like you’d give – you could give a car a name, couldn’t you? Our first car was called Matilda [laughs], but, I mean, it’s on that sort of level, if you see what I mean!

But if naming the ghost doesn’t confer personhood, if it is as meaningful as naming a car, such a move at least shows that RM has feelings *for* the ‘spooks’. Naming here is an act of affection, allowing for a level of emotional connection without the complication of this being a two-way encounter. Domesticating the ghost is about making it both familiar and family – it’s about caring for or about something. And what is more affectionate (and emasculating) than calling the ghost of the monk ‘Dolly’? Such a move contains the ‘other’ as something idiosyncratic rather than threatening. The name ‘Dolly’ also personalises this ghost on the level of associational memory, as RM explains:

RM: When I was a kid in Guernsey – in the memoriam column every year in the press, it used to say: ‘To our dear Brother Adolphus’. And in brackets it was always: ‘Dolly’. And this – it just moves me. And it came to mind, Brother Adolphus

She is amused by the incongruity between the monk's formal and affectionate names, and adopts the latter for her ghost monk. She then talks about the ghost as a 'house guest' – another way of domesticating it and of giving it a particular place in her home, as someone who is also just passing through, politely taking hospitality, not an equal co-habitee:

RM: Brother Dolly was the name I gave to him. Because, you see, when you've got a ghost, or what have you, you've got to give him a name. I mean, you know, you have to when you've got a house guest [laughs]

C: It's – only polite?

RM: It's only polite

But, later, she exposes a major flaw: *seeing* ghosts is still a sticking point. RM seems to reluctantly acknowledge some sort of independent agency for the ghost after all. But she does not attempt to square this circle, and the ambiguity of the ghosts' status as 'persons' is left hovering in the air:

RM: You have to give them a name, haven't you?

C: But at the same time, you are making characters out of these –

RM: But you have to, don't you?

C: Why do you have to?

RM: [Pause] Well, because I've seen them

Elsewhere, R in CS4 offers another example of naming the ghost as an act of domestication and affection. I note that she often refers to her ghost as 'Annie', whereas, as she herself has pointed out, the historical records name her as 'Anne'. In her response, R makes personal family connections for her use of the name:

C: Interesting that you're calling her 'Annie'

R: I know, because – I think because in Northumberland all 'Annes' get 'Annie' and because there's a lot of 'Annies' in my family [long description of various Annies, and Annes called Annie]

C: I thought it might be a way of making another connection with her?

R: It's a way of making a connection perhaps. Yeah, it must be. Without me realising it. Unconsciously I must be making a connection in calling her 'Annie'

In a further example, the family in CS5 inherit a ghost known to local villagers as the 'Pink Lady'. This name offers a suitably simple narrative of a rather generic figure of a woman wearing pink. The 'pink-dressed lady' becomes the catchy and emphatic 'Pink Lady'. The name is a strategy of co-habitation, familiarising and domesticating the ghost, and rendering it harmless and unthreatening by subtle allusion, pink being the colour conventionally associated with young girls.

Humour is also used as a strategy of domestication, and most often, like naming, it is used to belittle or infantilise the ghosts, taking away any latent power. Many interviews are punctured by sarcastic or jokey retorts. D in CS1, for example, notices a new word appearing on a wall in the living room which spelt out in Welsh, 'welcome'. This is taken as a response to my visit. D made light of it:

D: That's not there, hasn't been there – you know, it really does try to keep up to date

D prides himself on being a 'thinker' and in analysing the uncanny events in great detail. And yet, here, he suggests I am making him think of something that, by implication, is not worthy of thought. Joking, for him, keeps the uncanny in its place:

D: Now you're trying to make me think and analyse it - I mean, most of the time we joke about them

If humour is used to belittle uncanny events, this also serves a social purpose, anticipating and glossing over any potential conflicts between married partners. In CS5, for example, the couple downplay the role of the ghosts in their lives. During the interviews, the male sceptic clashes with his defensive wife, but at the end of the day, she says:

M: We are more or less joking about it

In CS9, the family makes jokes as a way of 'normalising' the situation, where events are various and occur almost daily. There was much laughter throughout the interview, even though the daughters were young and described events which frightened them. Telling stories was also an enactment of social dynamics within the family: humour is used by the mother and daughters to laugh at the men, and sometimes by the children to

laugh at the mother. At one point, discussing an impending holiday, V joked she'd 'leave the [ghosts] a list of do's and don'ts' – suggesting she is treating her own dead parents as unruly children.

Gender and Co-habitation

Much of the literature on the history of 'home' stresses the close relationship between women and domesticity, as described. Gender is a central issue emerging from the interviews, and as such becomes a key motif of the complex task of co-habiting with 'strangers', with its strategic possibilities as well as its dangers. Allowing the ghost a 'personhood' of some form also, importantly, grants it the possibility of having gender. Indeed, participants differ in their response to the ghosts depending on which gender they ascribe to them. A female ghost is easier to live with than a male one, is conferred far more positive or benign characteristics by both male and female participants. R in CS4 makes a connection with her female ghost by sharing traditionally female domestic pursuits, as described in Chapter Three. For B in CS10, the female ghost is a powerful rescue figure. Emphasising the ghost's female gender becomes a strategy of co-habitation. Such a ghost is granted more 'leeway'. Feminising a ghost is part of the process of domestication, familiarisation and containment, with only a few exceptions. Sometimes a male ghost is also emasculated. In the example above, the monk is named 'Dolly', which is perhaps particularly strategic given this ghost has been seen all over the property and is thus not easy to geographically contain.

Conventional gender categories

A theme running through most case studies is the prominence of cultural conventions used by participants to interpret the gender of their ghosts. Firstly, the anomalous events – such as fragmentary sounds – are utilised to suggest gender through conventional notions of dress, habit and role. Secondly, the ghosts tend to be conferred personal characteristics which seem to mirror participants' own ideas about gender. This process, in turn, dictates how and where inhabitants feel comfortable co-habiting with different ghosts: in particular, where ghosts are allowed to geographically *be* within the home. An exception is one event shared by all case studies: footsteps. These tend to be heard

ascending or descending staircases and are invariably associated with males, with participants always emphasising how heavy and distinctive the tread sounded. And yet, although footsteps are granted access to traverse the different storeys of a home, they are usually limited to the passing places rather than entering rooms.

Perhaps the use of gender conventions is a way in which the experience of being haunted is contained. Ghosts need to be common, and ordinary if they are to be familiar and unthreatening. Perhaps also, without the specificity of actual, 'situated' material bodies, it is easy for the immaterial body to become a one-dimensional cultural representation shaped by the living bodies around it for their own needs. Here, P in CS2 describes how she manipulates a hazy image of the ghosts, giving them a form she feels is appropriate for them:

P: Certainly long dresses for the women. And long and dark – how unusual for a ghost! – I haven't literally seen them, so I think this is my imagination. This is what is appropriate for those people to be wearing. I dress them up myself

Placing gender

CS11 is an example of both conventional gender assumptions and conventional social relations. A key event suggests a female ghost:

H: About a month after we moved here, I remember being on my knees on the attic space... stowing suitcases and things – busily putting things away. And the hatch upstairs into the attic was open and the metal ladder was in place. And I heard – definitely I heard rustling skirts coming up the staircase... [which] stopped at the foot of the ladder. And there was a beseeching sort of [she makes strange, loud, whispering sounds] – no words. I couldn't say what language it was. But I interpreted it – it was a lady needing urgent help

C: How did you make that assumption?

H: Rustling skirt. And a – whisper. It was a lady's whisper. It wasn't a male voice. It was a beseeching [makes the sound again] – as if she'd run out of breath, and she was looking for help. And I made a beeline down the ladder, expecting to see my neighbour,

in trouble. There was nobody there, but [husband] A. Coming up the staircase, saying, 'What do you want?' He was troubled. He thought it was me
A: Yes. I didn't hear any rustling skirts... But I heard a noise, and I heard a question. Somebody asked a question

A later asks his wife about how she knew the ghost was female:

A: How do you know it was a lady? I – someone asked a question. I don't know if it were a lady or not

H: Well. Silk skirts. Rustling

A: Someone asked a question

H: Yes. You didn't hear the rustling silk skirts

A: Oh, so that suggested it to you, the skirts, did it? That it was a female?

H: Yes

[Pause]

No. the beseeching request was a female voice. It was a strong whisper. But also the skirts. I heard the skirts first. It didn't occur to me that a male would put silk skirts on

A: Unless he's a member of the House of Lords with silk stockings [laughs]

The reading of gender is a very conventional one. The sound suggests a female to H, but her husband teases her. H couldn't contemplate anyone but a woman wearing a skirt – 'it didn't occur to me that a male would put silk skirts on'. Further conventional associations are found in the next anomalous sound event – boots in the downstairs living room which are taken to be those of a male:

H: We did hear – movement downstairs. As if big boots were – we heard the occasional time, early evening, sort of ten o'clockish... Because we sit here

This room, as described, is distant to the frequently-used areas of the house. Perhaps for this reason it is easier for H to distance herself from whatever male presence she imagines makes the sound of boots, whereas this is less possible for the female ghost, whose silk skirt (a sound familiar with seventeenth century ghost experience, as described in the first chapter) is heard going up the staircase, which runs close by the living room and bedrooms upstairs in this tall, narrow house:

H: I don't particularly like this [the downstairs] room because I could hear somebody coming in and wiping their feet on the doormat so many times – no, I prefer being upstairs

C: There's something that lingers in you, in relation to this room?

H: Yes. But the lady going up the stairs – I quite like, so that's alright [smiles]

C: Is it because it's a lady? That sounds like it might be important

H: [Smiles] Sympathy. [Pause] And not threatening. You know – there's nothing sort of bad or evil about it

There are grounds for viewing H's gendering of the ghosts as a strategy of co-habitation. It doesn't seem incidental that the ground floor living space is the least hospitable room in the house. A simple reading would be that the sound anomaly associated with this room is given a negative value because of its association with a room which might already be disliked. But H has no issue with the female ghost. She is not threatened by the ghost on the stairs – 'particularly because I've always thought it was a lady'. I push her to clarify her relationship with this ghost:

C: If it had been a male voice, would your response have been different?

H: Well, at the time, if it had been a male, and he had come up the stairs, and up to almost the attic, and I was in the attic, I might have recoiled and been concerned. Until I realised that it wasn't a real one

Her response would be different if the ghost had been male. But she would have only 'recoiled' until she realised the male voice was not that of a living human. There is a relationship here to the wider context of the vulnerability of women on their own: D in CS8 says something similar about her response to a potential male burglar when she hears uncanny footsteps. Elsewhere, however, some participants express the feeling that male ghosts are more threatening: despite their physicality being *immaterial*, it is still a *male* physicality. Here another distinction is clear. The ghosts might be characterised as persons, but they are still generally *less* than human. A gender hierarchy seems to be at work; male ghosts are more threatening than female ghosts, but less threatening than living males.

Elsewhere, in CS3, S tolerates the presence of the elderly couple who make up the house's ghosts. But, again, there is a clear geographical divide between where the male

and the female ghosts are separately seen. As with the previous example, the male ghost is never seen in the upstairs (more private) spaces, is confined to the ground floor level. In contrast, the female ghost is only ever seen upstairs. In turn, whereas the male ghost is seen 'fully formed' (the friend's son: 'Why have you got that old man in your living room?'), the female ghost is only ever an outline – a further strategy for maintaining a level of distance in the private areas. Here, the vagueness of the ghost's form, and the fact it is always just one step away, seen through open doorways – a fleeting reflection on the landing seen in a bedroom mirror; something quickly passing the open bathroom door whilst S sits on the toilet one night – offers some leeway in the way she interprets this ghost. How does she know – why is she so *adamant* – it is a female? The material remnants of the old couple's life, as described, become one clue: clothes left in the back bedroom, hanging in a wardrobe, suggest the area might have been frequented particularly by a female. But S's explanation is more to do with *feeling*:

C: If I asked you to draw the outline, would you be able to?

S: Yeah, it was defined like the hat, head, then the shoulders, and then straight down

C: Was it male or female?

S: I don't know. I've assumed it's her, it's the lady, as opposed to the man

C: Why's that?

S: Because the two times I've seen the figure, I've always just felt it was a lady. And the man – I've seen him once, and my friend's boy – he's seen him [downstairs]

C: So on that basis, you think she's upstairs, and he's downstairs?

S: Yeah

C: How does that work?

S: I don't know. I've seen him downstairs, recently. But I've only seen this figure upstairs... I've never seen him upstairs. I just get the impression that the figure was a woman

C: So you had these experiences of seeing the outline of what you assume was the woman

S: Yes, it's like a grey silhouette, but it's not – looking at it, you wouldn't tell if it were a man or woman. Just a shape... Um. But I just had this feeling that it was the lady – I've always just felt it was a lady

C: What's that feeling?

S: I just get the feeling that – I don't know, inside – that that is a woman not a man. But I don't know why

She is able to tolerate the female ghost close to the bathroom and bedrooms – this is a repeated motif and forms a key strategy of co-habitation.

Benign female/malevolent male

In CS5, the main female ghost is non-threatening, respects privacy, and keeps her distance – the perfect co-habitee. She is even allowed into the bedrooms, placing blankets on a daughter in the night. She is mistaken for the mother; her ‘special relationship’ mirrors that of a mother for her daughter:

G: My sister... told me... that every night she goes to bed, either before she falls asleep, or sometime during the night she wakes up, and there's this lady in front of the door, checking her... at some point during the night [when sleeping in the same room] I heard somebody moving her sheets – like when mum's coming and checking if you are in bed, and if the blanket is off, to put it on you. So there was this kind of rustling noise. And then I had this feeling that somebody was really making sure that she was fine. And then [laughs] my sister said: 'Thank you'. I thought about that in the morning. I felt a bit –

M: Strange! [Laughs]

G: – a bit stressed about that

M: I think my daughter has a special relationship with the Pink Lady... she has had a lot of these kind of experiences, that somebody is taking care of her. Once she told me in the morning: 'Thank you mum, you came to put the quilt. I was freezing... I'm so sorry I didn't say anything but I was so sleepy'. I said: 'It's not me you should thank' [Smiles]. And this happened a couple of times actually

This story echoes another, reinforcing a belief in the ghost's caring nature:

M: The story goes that before the husband [the previous owner] died, he saw the Pink Lady twice. The lady came in the bedroom and sat on the bed... The daughter told me... she came here to collect some things she had forgotten, and then we started talking... And she said, quite seriously: 'Oh, the Pink Lady, she's so kind, she doesn't mean any harm. When she comes, she only comes to take care'

M is happy to believe in the 'Pink Lady', but more taciturn about the possibility of male ghosts – implied by events including the smell of pipe tobacco, a heavy tread upstairs, and a shadowy form seen from the garden – the latter two at first mistaken for her husband. There is also an ambiguous event involving a window closing in her own bedroom which unnerves her at a time when her husband is away on business. An exception to the positive-negative gender binary is that the pipe-smokers in this case study are described positively. But M is reluctant to be explicit about their gender, although she makes the conventional association. And she seems particularly comforted by the thought that the smokers form part of a large, *mixed* gender family group, implied by other smells – sweet bread and fresh coffee. She starts off using the neutral 'they':

M: Maybe it's only nice to know, ok – perhaps they have had a – rather nice life.

[Pause] Whoever – has been here before, or have been here before... I think it's very cosy if they are sitting here and drinking coffee and the men are smoking pipes. Nothing to worry about

When pushed, she prefers the convoluted phrase, 'a being who likes tobacco' rather than to state that the pipe-smokers are men:

M: I think [she sniffs], 'Oh, it's coffee today!' Or, after a while [sniffs], 'Obviously, he has his pipe now'

C: So you think it's a man?

M: No, it's only, I think that – somehow I think it's a being who likes tobacco

C: Would it be a pipe that men use, not women?

M: [Nods quietly] Yes. I don't know

In some case studies, as described, female ghosts are tolerated in bedrooms, often acting in physically intimate ways: in CS8, the ghost of the doting grandmother slaps her grandson in his bed if he has forgotten to do something; in CS10, the female ghost of a previous inhabitant lies on top of the caretaker in his bed to protect him. In contrast, male ghosts in the bedroom are usually characterised as threatening, or as an invasion of privacy. T in CS6 has to deal with intrusive male presences in two bedrooms. First, she describes a sinister male ghost in a previous rented room:

T: I was very frightened... I left the light on and the music on all the night. And one night somebody says, 'Stop the music!'... But I leave the lights on... And after that, a few days... 'Stop the lights!'

C: A female or a male voice?

T: I think it was a man... I have to leave London and go back to Romania. And the last night before I leave, I had a very bad dream, like somebody from the back touch me, and say, 'I cut you'

O: I caught you

C: Caught?

T: Like somebody hauled me from the back, and I see a leg with hair, horrible leg hair

O: Somebody grabbed her

The 'horrible leg hair' reinforces T's narrative about a threatening male ghost. In the current home, T stoically puts up with the attentions of another male ghost in a room she is paid to stay at every night. At one point, she wakes up to hear snoring next to her pillow:

T: The snoring was a man. Definitely, like a man breathes

At another point, she finds a handprint on her body whilst getting dressed one morning:

T: Like a male one, you know. Finger by finger, a perfect one

Another example of the gender binary appears in CS9, where the family rely on a medium to explain who the ghosts are. She tells them they are dead family members, with the grand/mother most prominent. One night the family experience disruptive, poltergeist-like events, which are blamed on a dead uncle. In contrast, she also mentions a dead aunt who is 'helpful' and only visits to be supportive. The dead uncle is the unruly male, the aunt the caring female:

V: The medium said: 'Leave the others. He's got to go'

In CS10, as described, there is the dramatic incident where the male ghost is angry and threatening, the female ghost benign and protecting. The male ghost (or 'demon') proves difficult to define:

B: I suddenly heard the sound of running feet from the long gallery. And it got louder and louder... I heard roaring, shouting

C: Was this a man's voice?

B: Yes. It was a man. Very angry. Extremely nasty. And crazed. I thought, 'God almighty, this is awful'... The sound got louder and louder... then bursting in through the door... And this thing came straight for me. Straight up to the bed. It was just a charge, all the way, unrelenting

The female protector/saviour is granted the bodily contours and sensations of human physicality: a soft, intimate, comforting, female body. The male entity is described by its own rage and momentum, the female presence by the feeling it engenders. B feels not only saved from the angry force, but also accepted as a part of the house:

B: And something rolled over on top of me. A body. Rolled on top of me. From the side

C: Can you remember how it felt?

B: Comfort. Absolute comfort. And protection. Absolute safety. Nothing could hurt me. And I was shocked. I felt the weight – of a body – on top of me. I felt, without seeing a face, without seeing the body... very comforting warmth... I felt accepted... It wasn't just a feeling of body. It was a comforting feeling. It was like a love. I took it as being accepted

The female ghost is also allowed super-human, pseudo-spiritual powers to avert evil – a power of love opposing a power of anger. But this ghost is also a named, gendered person, a well-known historical character. The angry force is both formless and nameless: uncontained, undomesticated. B describes this thing as 'not human'. The category of 'normal' is expanded to incorporate the female ghost. The male ghost, however, falls outside such a category, and B struggles to articulate how it might be defined, more confident in stating at first what it is not:

B: I just knew this was not normal, this was not real. It was not human. It was something – ghostly. Monster. Something horrible. It was just a charge, all the way, unrelenting

He uses three words which replace each other, as he struggles to describe and thus contain the phenomena: 'ghostly' is rejected for 'monster', but he settles on a vaguer

phrase – ‘something horrible’ – before moving to define a process rather than a ‘being’. Even here there is a tacit gendering of the thing that has feet to run and a voice to shout: from angry male to something horrible in one description. Such an extreme force cannot be named, domesticated, personified, or laughed away. It requires an emergency response, one which upholds other more comforting conventions.

PART B: STRATEGIES OF DISTANCE AND COMMUNICATION

If ‘gender’ sometimes proves difficult to pull off as a strategy, there are plenty of others. Similar themes emerged from the transcripts again and again, and formed themselves into distinct patterns. By far the most popular strategies were those which created forms of ‘distance’ between householders and their ghosts. But there were also positive experiences and relationships, and a surprising amount of communication by participants, at least *to* or *at* the ghosts, even if this was sometimes motivated by defensiveness rather than a desire for connection.

Distance

Geography

The most obvious way distance is maintained is through the geographies of the home, in particular, how participants differentiate between its more public and more private areas. How far ghosts are allowed to ‘roam’ depends on participants’ relationship to them and their assumed characteristics; as described in Part A, for example, female ghosts are allowed more leeway than male ghosts because they are felt to be less threatening. Bedrooms and bathrooms are deemed the more private areas, where bodies are most exposed. Passing places such as staircases, hallways, and landings, are more public, as described in Chapter Three. Confining ghosts to these spaces is a key strategy of spatial distancing. There are very few examples of ghosts in bathrooms. Even in CS3, where S sees a ghost whilst in the bathroom, the ghost doesn’t actually enter the room but is seen fleetingly in the hallway. The ghosts are often assumed to share respect for personal space:

C: If you're in the bathroom -

V: I don't think I've ever experienced anything in the bathroom. I think they do give us privacy in certain places, like that (CS9)

Not everyone can maintain such a belief. K in CS2 is self-conscious because the toilet is directly at the bottom of the staircase where the ghosts reside:

K: I have to close the toilet door because I feel like there's someone on the stairs watching me. I don't know if they are. I just feel like that's just my paranoia about me being watched. You know, I just don't like the idea of anybody watching me anywhere

In this case study, as described, there is a complex relationship between material and immaterial space because although participants necessarily have to pass 'through' the ghosts' spot on the landing, the ghosts are always conveniently somewhere else:

P: This has got to be their spot. I'm here. But I don't think they're close. So they are never right on top of me. They are always at some distance

The thought of being watched by something unseen is often the main motive for desiring distance. In CS5, geography is also important:

C: You mentioned you wouldn't be happy at the thought of somebody watching you – who you couldn't see –

M: Yes

C: How do you feel about that?

M: Now, sometimes when I come down the stairs, I know that someone's standing there – up the stairs there. On the landing

C: Really?

M: I don't see anything there. But it's a very strong feeling that somebody's watching when I'm coming down. But it's only the stairs

C: How would you feel if it wasn't the stairs?

[Pause]

C: If you felt watched –

M: [quietly] – everywhere. Yes

[Pause]

C: You would feel – different?

M: Yes. I think it would be. Then it would disturb my privacy – in my home. But I haven't got that feeling

C: So the ghost is – respecting your privacy?

M: Yes. So really – we let them be, they let us be! [Laughs]

Later, she describes the boundary beyond which the ghosts are not allowed:

M: I think this is the limit. This is the limit. That I can accept somebody living here, or some ones are living here – or some things are here. [Pause] But I think I wouldn't like anybody to stand there. It depends on the situation, and what would happen, and things like that. Maybe it would be a nice experience. But I am not looking forward to that

The rules are clearly set out: the staircase is not a threatening place to feel watched, but don't come into places where she spends time. As will be described, for M it is also important for the ghost not to be *seen*. But the thought of being watched by something *unseen* is equally unnerving. So different strategies are employed, building upon one another; if one doesn't quite work, another piece of scaffolding is added to prop up the narrative.

One strategy, for example, is to assume that a participant is *never* being watched, which requires a belief that the ghosts are disinterested in the living and that they are also themselves 'submerged' in familiarity which renders them unaware. Here, there is no need to feel self-conscious in the bedroom or bathroom:

Ch: I don't think that matters. I don't think these things bother [the ghosts] at all. In that sense, it's just part and parcel... they're not interested. I don't think they're interested in what I do, in my day to day life. But I think it's that newness, where something that happens – it's a reaction to, you know, what happens (CS2)

The ghosts react to novelty (in a similar way to participants, as described in Chapter Three), but are not 'bothered' by ordinary domestic activity. Ch deals with any potential intrusion into her private life assertively:

C: How do you feel about doing personal things?

Ch: That wouldn't bother me at all. They're dead. They should move on. If they have a problem with that, move on!

But even *she* wavers a little as the thought of her dead father enters her head. Her strategy isn't foolproof:

Ch: My dad... I have felt him around, I have seen him once. I remember thinking: 'Oh, I couldn't have sex, because he'd be watching me'. But then I realised, 'Look, he obviously had sex himself at some stage, or else I wouldn't be here'. Anyway. And he's dead. So [laughs]

Playing down impact

Another major strategy is to play down the ghosts' impact on domestic life. In Part A I suggested ways in which naming and humour are used for this purpose. There are more overt distancing strategies also employed, including mental and emotional blocking. RM in CS1 talks about distancing herself from events as a form of mental trick:

RM: They're – in the background... And I can do this, distance myself from it

The ghosts' importance in participants' lives is downgraded significantly. RM admits she talks about them, but, as described, plays down their centrality on an 'everyday level':

RM: We have much more important things to consider... So we don't talk about it a lot

Sometimes there are reasons to play down events, such as a desire to protect children:

H: Oh yes, we told them [about the event]. Because it was so unusual and odd... But we didn't sort of play on it, we played it down rather than anything else (CS11)

For P in CS2, there is a belief that *thinking* about the ghosts might 'conjure' them, something she avoids:

P: If I thought about it a lot, I might be perturbed, maybe that's why I avoid thinking about them. I try not to – conjure them up

Her 'sensitive' flatmate, Ch, requires a more elaborate distancing strategy:

C: You say you never actually see the ghosts?

Ch: No... I have to learn to block it out. So when I'm with the presence in a house, I don't want to be picking up too – much energy. Because – it's very tiring. It's absolutely exhausting, actually. It just knocks too much out of me – I think you can block it out. It's something I had to learn to do a while ago – shut down... How do I do it? It's almost like a conscious thing. 'I'm not – I don't want to know', and I ignore it. And they get tired of – hanging around

People also dwelt on more positive events, playing down negative ones which might not fit their overall narrative. R in CS4, for example, talks at length about her positive connection with her ghost. Right at the end of all our conversations, she lets slip in passing she had been hit by a bottle:

R: When I was in the bath an empty shampoo bottle hit me at the back of my head... It flew at me in a way that couldn't have been an accident. The bathroom was her [the ghost's] living room... I see it as her fear

And despite the amount of effort she puts into researching the ghost, she doesn't want me to think it is a central feature of her life:

R: I don't have any affect about this, if you know what I mean. There's no psychological – I'm not emotionally attached to it really. I mean, I'm interested and I'm intrigued. I find it strange, funny

T in CS6 has no choice but to face up to the uncanny events with stoicism as she has agreed to stay in the house for money. Her strategy is to accentuate the positive, dwelling on the economic benefit. Stripped of emotional content, the situation sounds too good to be true:

T: For me it's the same whether I sleep here or in my room. But with a great advantage because she's paying me for this. She's paying me. So I start sleeping there all the time in this house. All the time. And I'm very happy

It becomes clear that T takes the brunt of the ghost's attention, but she refuses to give in to fear, because she needs the money:

C: So you can treat the ghost like it's – not threatening?

T: No. I try to don't. Because then I lose my job, you know? If you start to be frightened, you collapse only. You can't go on like that

T needs to maintain a sense of distance, a boundary between her and the ghost; she does so through enforcing a particular emotional attitude – not to 'collapse'.

Not seeing

In Chapter Three, I described how the majority of events are auditory. Many participants prefer this, actively discouraging events from being too 'clear-cut'. Not seeing offers leeway for co-habitation. It is a strategy of distance, keeping the ghosts at bay:

K: [On seeing ghosts] I don't mind other people [seeing them]. I just don't want to have them myself (CS2)

For M in CS5, seeing the ghost would make the haunting too 'real'. Despite her generally positive attitude towards it, she needs it to keep to its 'place', which means not allowing itself to be witnessed close-up. Here she lets slip her anxiety:

M: Then the man from the alarm – told a lot about this lady [the ghost]. And in the end he said, 'Oh my dear, it would be so exciting and interesting to see the real ghost!' And I thought that, 'Not if you are living in the house!' [laughs]

She imagines how it might feel to be in the garden and see a ghost at the window, to be outside looking in at a haunted house she has to re-enter. Again, this fantasy – which

mirrors her neighbour's experience of mistaking *her* for a ghost at the window – causes unease:

C: You said before [the ghost] makes the house more interesting

M: Yes, but I don't like to see it. Once we were standing in the garden and I said to my daughter: 'Look at the windows upstairs. What would you think about if you see somebody looking back?' And we talked about it, and we both came to the same conclusion – the it wouldn't be very nice to go back inside the house after that [laughs]

This is interesting because she had previously laughed at her neighbour for being fearful – even though what frightened him wasn't even in *his* own home. It also parallels another uncanny event. She describes being in the garden and seeing a shadowy form walking through the house, which she at first mistakes for her husband who is asleep upstairs. The anxiety she expresses is an example of the way in which her positive narrative shows some cracks. The more she talks, the more she allows herself to imagine scenarios and explore the wider range of her feelings about the situation. But the key issue here concerns her desire not to see the ghost – and as this hasn't happened, at least not distinctly, at close range – she can maintain such a stance as part of the positive narrative. In fact, she believes this cannot and will not happen. There is a 'hierarchy' of senses at play in the haunted home: the less distinct the event the better. Other beliefs back up this state as something more than wishful thinking:

C: So is there a difference between hearing things and seeing things?

M: Yes. I haven't seen anything except these shadows, you know. But I know that I am a woman – the Pink Lady won't come to see me

C: Why do you think that is?

M: [Laughs] I believe what I've been told. You see. It's only men she like to see

C: Is that a relief?

M: In a way, yes. Because I don't want to come face to face with anything – like that. As long as it's more like a fairy tale. It doesn't matter so much. [She talks of the shadows, smells and noises, how these don't frighten her because they are ambiguous]... But I'm not sure what I would think about the situation where I was standing – face to face with the Pink Lady. I wouldn't like that. That is something I wouldn't like

C: Would that make her more real?

M: It would make it more real. Now I can always – take it so – whatever. There is space enough for all of us. There is room enough for all of us. As long as we don't disturb each other

C: And disturbing means – don't – materialise?

M: [Laughs] Yes

C: Don't – show your face?

M: Yeah. I don't like to see her

The distinction between seeing and not seeing is very clear. To come face to face with the ghost is to make it 'real': there would then be no leeway for imagining the ghost otherwise, a key tactic for negotiating space to allow co-habitation. There is a strong imaginary component to how space is sensed: seeing 'constricts' space. But there remains an underlying anxiety in avoiding an experience one has no control over. M's solution is to take on board a rather vague myth about the ghost – she doesn't appear to women:

M: The first thing is that it is only men who can see. Not any women

Again, this belief doesn't strictly fit experience. M has already described a sighting by a daughter. Her other daughter tries to raise this point:

G: We are not sure that – [they confer in Finnish] – if women can have –

M: – only the figure. Because those who have really seen her –

C: You are talking about your daughter?

M: Yes. The youngest daughter – [speaks in Finnish, then laughs, takes a deep breath, as if about to embark on a story, then changes the subject]

The language barrier acts as a filtering system for the narrative, allowing M to discuss finer points before presenting them to me as outsider-researcher. But she just lets the point hang, suspended in the air. She seems to give up and move on, to refuse the challenge. Further ideas are tried out, to mould and wriggle her distancing strategies into shape.

M's Finnish compatriot, H in CS11, also employs the same sense 'hierarchy'. I asked her the usual question: did she ever feel she was being watched?

H: [Quietly] No. [Pause] No. I never saw anybody. I never saw anything at all. I only heard things

C: Does that make a difference – if you actually see something?

H: Oh, I think so. I think so. Because then if you have an image – say this monk my neighbour saw – she was – I mean, she had to talk about it to somebody. She came over the field to talk to me. She couldn't sort of rest about it. She was disturbed

*C: The fact that you don't see anyone makes you able to live with the experience
[Pause and silence as I spoke – as if she was holding her breath]*

I find that quite interesting

[Pause]

Is it because it's not given a – form, a reality?

[Pause]

H: I think it's a lesser phenomenon in many ways. And there was absolutely no threat. The lady asking for help

I pressed her further:

C: Because there hasn't been a fully-fledged visual form seen, then it's slightly distanced?

H: Yes, it is. Yes

C: Does that make it easier to deal with?

H: Oh yes. Definitely. Oh definitely. If I'd been in the shoes or skirts of my next door neighbour, who saw the dark monk-like figure –

A: She'd had too much gin!

H: She wasn't drinking gin!

H takes pity on her friend, who was 'disturbed', because she saw something and had to come round and talk the experience out of her system. There is a difference between seeing and imagining the form of a ghost. Often what is seen is just a shadow, an outline, or something without clear 'form'. As described, participants have different responses to this: on the one hand, formlessness can be more frightening because it suggests something not categorisable, more-than human, with greater potential power, such as the 'demon' described by B in CS10. There is a suggestion also that such formless entities cannot be 'contained' to particular places within the home, just as they are not 'contained' by human-like bodies. On the other hand, sightings that are vague

are less threatening. M does not include in her narrative, above, the event of seeing the shadowy form of what she takes to be a man. In CS3, it seems to be significant that the distinct form of the male ghost is only ever seen downstairs, whilst the female ghost upstairs is only ever described as an outline, like a silhouette of a person. Such a vague sighting is a less 'real' phenomenon.

But as described, participants often appear to prefer a ghost *with* form, an ordinary *someone* rather than a strange *something*, and this must suggest a process in which the ghost is visualised: the gendered person of the ghost must take on a distinct form. Most favoured of all is to see a *vague, indistinct* form which *implies* something human-like but doesn't present itself as too clear-cut a vision. As suggested in Chapter Three, 'seeing' ghosts is often similar to 'sensing' them for some people, suggesting a strong imaginary component: they 'complete' the hazy picture in their mind, allowing for a level of control and containment. RM in CS1 dismisses one vision: 'I saw what I wanted to see'; P in CS2 concedes that she 'clothes' the ghosts she only sees as hazy outlines: 'This is what is appropriate for those people to be wearing. I dress them up myself'. M in CS7 also describes how he develops a 'mental picture' of a man he doesn't completely see:

M: I saw someone through the corner of my eye. Through the music room window – the back window looking out onto the garden. I saw a movement. And I developed from this a mental picture of a large man with red hair. It was a flicker of movement

H in CS11 also 'fills in the gaps' where physical details are lacking. For her, distinctly *seeing* the ghost is too intimate an event within the confined spaces of the domestic interior. Again, what is important to her is that visualisation is an *imaginative* exercise: it is about granting a form of materiality out of the immaterial of the mind. H has control over this process, can fall back on gender conventions. The narrative of the event is not closed but can be fantasised differently, manipulated to suit one's needs. Not seeing allows for the possibility that things aren't quite as they 'appear'. Reality is graded in order to contain lived experience.

Some participants can't help but look out for the ghosts, even if this goes against their better instincts. As described in Chapter Three, S knows that seeing one at night will stop her from sleeping:

S: And sometimes if I'm lying in bed at night when I'm here on my own, I look in the mirror and I think, 'Oh, I might see something go past the door'. But I don't. I don't see anything else... I do tend to look out. And sometimes I think, 'Oh, I'm so tired, I don't want to see anything tonight'

In contrast, M in CS7 makes a point of not being curious, of *not* looking out, after hearing footsteps:

M: I did go to the back [where footsteps are heard], but then I thought it was better not to look out!... I wasn't very – ignorance is bliss, isn't it?

For S, she looks but she 'doesn't want to see anything tonight'. For M, he decides it is 'better not to look out'. These participants respond in opposite ways to each other, but both suggest an anxiety about *seeing* a ghost, and how this might disrupt their night's sleep.

Ghosts don't/can't communicate

For many participants, it is important that events are not interpreted as attempts to communicate or engage. The ghosts might be in the home, but they are only tangentially part of domestic life. P in CS2 expresses ambivalence, claiming that she would like to make contact with the ghosts, but then arguing that this isn't possible, and that, in fact, she would rather prefer to avoid them:

C: Would you be intrigued to see them closer?

P: Yes, but I feel like that's never going to be a possibility... I feel very strongly that I won't get to know them... But then, I'm very shy too... You know, I wouldn't be marching up towards them. I would be definitely avoiding them

A key strategy, as suggested, is to believe the ghosts are living parallel lives, with their own concerns, and hence ignoring their co-habitees:

Ch: I don't think they're watching. I think they're entertaining themselves

P: I've felt like that. That they're not watching me. I don't feel infringed, or spied upon. But they are there and they are concerned with their own concerns. I don't even know if they are aware of me... I haven't felt that they were coming to see me, I just felt that they belonged in that place and that's where they were, that they were doing their own thing (CS2)

Ch removes any anxiety about having a male ghost in her bedroom by describing him as disinterested in her, and he respectfully keeps to the corner of the room too:

Ch: He's totally ignoring – I'm inconsequential. He's doing whatever he's doing. But sometimes I do wake up and I sense his presence there very much. But that doesn't frighten me

C: Because he's just –

Ch: He's doing his own thing. He's reading something, and he's just standing, reading... I think most people [ghosts] are generally respectful, and I think if there are ghosts, they're going around, they're just doing whatever they're doing, they're there for whatever they're there for

A lack of interaction, for Ch, equals proper etiquette, good manners. The ghosts know how to keep distance and wish to do so. S in CS3 offers a variation on this idea; the ghosts will warn her when they are around:

S: I just think the only time they're about is when you see them or you hear them. I don't get the impression that they're here all the time

V in CS9 also plays down interaction in a similar way:

V: We just carry on as normal. And just [pause] if they want to let us know they're here at that particular point, they do

Elsewhere, R in CS4 prefers to believe her ghost isn't a constant presence. D in CS8 can only believe that the Catholic saints are 'watching over me', but glosses over the idea of ghosts doing likewise. M in CS7, similarly says:

M: I don't get a sense that the house is occupied

He also interprets the ghosts as distanced from him: events happen *despite* his own presence in the house. He doesn't believe he was singled out to hear the sounds (C: 'Did you think these footsteps were doing it for you – knowing you were there?' M: 'No. I don't think so').

Less successfully, there are also certain beliefs that afford the idea of *temporal* distance. As described in Chapter Three, the ghosts are sometimes seen as less in present than past time, or are subject to ritual repetition. For R in CS4, her ghost is in a 'time loop' and cannot choose when to appear. But such beliefs often sit uneasily with descriptions of real-time engagement:

R: Why should [the painting] always be on a slant? [Pause, then emphatic] I just don't get it. I just sometimes feel that, you know, when I'm out, she goes round, and if she doesn't like something that's going on a bit, in the house, she goes round and moves – and just brushes the pictures (CS4)

Later, she returns to vague notions of temporal distance:

R: I don't think she chooses. It's a time thing, a loop. A very strong impression is made
C: But she has been described as interacting, going through people's stuff, staring at your daughter's friend, enjoying your jams – ?

I express some surprise that she still maintains an idea that the ghost is a passive residue of non-linear time, rather than having the level of wilful agency that many events suggest. R doesn't answer, moving swiftly to talk about other things.

RM in CS1 – who, as described, is adamant the ghosts don't have 'feelings' – betrays an underlying concern here, imagining how she might respond if interaction was possible, if that boundary is breached:

RM: Although things happen, we don't interact with them. I mean, we don't seriously interact. And I wouldn't want to seriously interact with them, even if I thought I could, because I think that would screw my head up. And then I wouldn't be living here. I would be out of here... So I don't. I try to – rise above – I don't, I – keep them in a different [waves her hands in front of her face] place in my head. If that makes any sense? – to everyday living. And people don't understand that. And it's very hard for me

to explain it... If I really, really put my mind to it, maybe I wouldn't want to live here. So I've got to, so I think you've got to sort of... For me to live here, I've got to – distance myself. I can't connect with it. I have to distance myself from it... [Believing ghosts have personalities] would get uncomfortable

Such strategic beliefs, again, don't fit with her descriptions of some events. For example, she interprets objects such as wooden picture frames having been burnt or singed as a way the ghosts communicate displeasure:

RM: A lot of the burning, that comes when people have done, said something stupid

Negative events are forms of punishment. Here, she criticises her husband for sarcastically asking the ghosts for lottery numbers:

RM: You were very rude to the spooks... and so we got most numbers [appearing on the walls] between one and forty nine. It was sort of, take your pick

Elsewhere, she describes a rare example of eye contact, which suggests a level of recognition on the ghost's part:

RM: She seemed to eye-ball me. She seemed to – indicate that she's seen me

Here, again, there is a disconnection between a desire for distance and events which suggest present-time interaction.

Not talking

RM suggested, above, a need to be respectful about how one talks in the presence of the ghost. There appears an element of superstition (M in CS7: 'We shouldn't try to communicate'), which relates to concerns that ghosts might have more-than human powers, or, perhaps, that to communicate is to cross an unnatural boundary. As described, some participants believe that ghosts can hear what they say, might even be able to get inside their head. This suggests an anxiety that no real privacy is possible in a haunted home, and privacy here is construed as the ability to speak one's mind (or

thoughts) without feeling inhibited or worrying about consequences. This perhaps explains why some people express reservations about talking about – or to – their ghosts. There is a related belief, vaguely expressed, that words/thoughts in themselves have power to affect events. P in CS2 said she didn't want to 'conjure' up the ghosts by thinking about them: describing the ghosts might make them more 'real'. The narrative conjures the ghosts into existence. But there is something about morality and etiquette here too. Perhaps this is partly what RM meant when she told her husband off; cause and effect are seen to work on a level of human morality. For P, to talk about the ghosts might be to lack respect for them; it might cause them to be misinterpreted. Words categorise the ghosts, thus potentially imposing upon them a false reality:

P: I keep it very private... I wasn't dying to talk to anybody about them. And in some ways I'm happier not to talk about them... I didn't want to explore them too much or make them more real, or misinterpret them. In a way I'm reluctant to talk about them and it's strange to talk about them, because I don't know what they're up to and I really... don't know how much is my business. Because when you're putting things into words, you have to be quite clear. And I don't feel that clear... I don't want to pigeon hole the poor old ghosties!

Despite such concerns, participants seem to spend a lot of time talking about, and in particular, talking *to*, the ghosts, as explored in the next section. Nonetheless, people's reticence to talk does imply a level of unease. And, as shall be described, it is often unease which *compels* people to talk despite their concerns about doing this. Of course, participants talked to me as researcher about their ghosts, often doing so whilst playing down the need to talk about them:

S: We don't tend to talk about it. Maybe my mum and my sister, if we are together... but other than that, no. We talk about other things (CS3)

The social context is important, because S lives with her sceptical male partner who isn't interested in talking about the ghosts. Her mother and sister, on the other hand, are fascinated. V in CS9 also expressed some nerves about talking about her dead mother, the main ghost in the house. I was surprised by this, given she was close to her mother and the events seem a constant talking-point in the family:

C: So you're nervous talking about her. Are you not used to talking about it?

V: Not so in depth. Just little bits, here and there, really – isn't it, that we talk about it?

The family uses a familiar form of shorthand with each other to talk about events. This seems to be an unexceptional aspect of the family dynamic – after all, having shared many uncanny events, they are unlikely to need to spell out their every detail when recalling them. But there is anxiety here, as if to talk so explicitly, so in depth, might create a different, more emphatic, effect than speaking 'little bits' of description.

Elsewhere, a lack of desire to communicate with the ghosts is less about nervous reticence, more an expression of confidence. For Ch in CS2, opening up lines of communication with the ghosts might 'encourage' them. Her stance is hardnosed; there is no desire to co-habit here. Ghosts are in 'someone else's space' and have no rights of their own, should be neither seen nor heard:

Ch: I think they're very selfish, and the reason they're so selfish is because they're still hanging around in someone else's space, really. You know, it's like a third person in your relationship. The ex-girlfriend, hanging around when she knows she should go! And if they thought that someone will give them an opening at all, they would

C: Do what?

Ch: Come in to talk, to acknowledge them. I don't know –

C: Take up more of your space?

Ch: Yeah. Take up more of your time and your space. In a selfish way

Again, talking to the ghosts is to narrate them into existence – here by acknowledging to them that they are a part of the household.

Communication

The above examples illustrate how participants use strategies to keep the ghosts ‘at bay’. In contrast, some participants actively play up the positive nature or value of their ghosts, or the experience of living in a haunted home. They open up tentative channels of ‘communication’, even a *desire* to connect, or moments where these appear to happen spontaneously, to some degree. But not all communication is engendered with a spirit of positive and confident openness; as will be described, people ‘talk to’ their ghosts for different reasons. This section begins with an exploration of positive interpretations of people’s co-habitation with ghosts.

Connecting

In CS5, there is a sharing of sensory pleasures between previous and current inhabitants. In particular, the uncanny smells of fresh bread and coffee are appealing to M and her daughter. The smells are experienced in a corner of the living room which is M’s favourite place to sit in an evening, so the connection is also about sharing the *space*, as described. The smells, for M, exude a feeling of domestic contentment, that the ghosts had a ‘nice life’:

M: You see, this is my favourite place. I love to read there. And there is this [side] light, so I sit here very often in the evenings. Then, so I have the same experience very often because I used to sit there very much

As described, S in CS3 suggests that the good atmosphere in her home is also the responsibility of the ghosts:

C: Do you think this atmosphere comes from the ghosts?

S: Yes, yes

C: The ghosts themselves are making you feel calm?

S: I think so. Yes

R in CS4, also attributes the ‘good vibes’ of her cottage to the ghost:

R: I call the rooms 'hers' which are in one cottage... It has wonderful good vibes. The other cottage (we made two into one) doesn't seem to be so influenced, and it doesn't have nearly such good vibes either

When talking about the positive nature of living with ghosts, participants often revert to the term 'spirit':

R: All I know is it is never frightening. Almost heartening to know there is a spirit alive in the house

There are also a few striking one-off events which have a positive emotional effect on inhabitants. In CS7, music teacher M is 'taken over' by the sound of singing:

M: The next [event] – I think was after my father died. Must have been... Months afterwards I was in the breakfast room, when I suddenly started to hear beautiful female choral singing. It was like heavenly singing

C: What do you mean by 'heavenly singing'?

M: I couldn't – I didn't know the language. It might have been Latin, I don't know. But – I mean, it was just voices, unaccompanied

C: Being a music scholar, would you expect to recognise the piece?

M: No. It was nothing I knew. I felt – it's funny, I thought I was in a trance-like state at the time. I was awake, but – [pause]

C: And did it give you an emotional feeling while you listened?

M: Oh, it was very calming. Yes

He begins the story by connecting it with his father's death, although it is unclear if he uses this date as a memory aid or associates the event itself with his father. The 'heavenly' choir has a calming, mesmerising effect on him. There is an intimate sense of enchantment in his description – a rare example where an inhabitant seems to completely let his guard down, at least for a few minutes. Sound permeates the air, there is no separation between him and the event, which emerges around him and merges with him.

In CS2, P also hears ghosts singing and at prayer, which she finds comforting:

P: I have heard very comforting singing. It was not public singing. It was kind of private... It would be someone singing to themselves, not a performance... And it wasn't intended to be heard... It's very soft and comforting

C: Like it's reassuring?

P: It's not personally reassuring to me, but I get a sense it's reassuring to them... It's independent of me. They are not my prayers... I quite like to hear other people engage in their – prayers. The prayers on the stairs are private and genuine... I have a feeling it's people praying together... It's a comforting feeling

This is, uniquely, an inhabitant who eavesdrops on the *ghosts'* private moments. The sense of their distinct life in the house, and their separate agency, is very clear. But despite the geographical distance and lack of personal meaning, it is still quite an emotionally intimate experience. It calms P when she can't sleep at night.

Accepting

S in CS3 puts a positive spin on the *ghosts'* desire to interact: they are curious. Curiosity is rendered benign because it is not interfering or judgmental, and mirrors S's own curiosity about *them*. As previous inhabitants, the ghosts have a common interest in the house and what happens to it:

S: I do think they only come back when they want to see what's happening, what's changing around here... They are curious to what is going on. If they've lived there and they suddenly think: 'Oh! Something's happening there, something's changing'... You know, obviously they must understand

As described in Chapter Three, she prefers to believe that the ghosts would 'understand' how she likes to do things differently, put her own mark on the house. There is an assumed empathy:

S: I would think, I would hope, that they would think, 'Oh, they're updating or doing what they want to do there'. You know, like they did, perhaps. You know. They've changed things obviously from when probably the house was built

In general, S assumes the ghosts are like *her* – they might be a little judgemental (but so is *she* about *their* taste in furnishings), but have a common-sense attitude to the change in ‘ownership’. Others also assume similarities as a co-habitation strategy, such as the friends in CS2, who, as described, believe their ghosts are not religiously orthodox but share the same values.

For B in CS10, if ghosts are like people, that means they contain both good and bad human personality traits. This isn’t a problem for him. There is an unconditional acceptance of the ghosts whether good or bad, based on the principle of connection. As described, he sees himself, and all human nature, as a mixture of good and bad, and perceives the ghosts as an extension of this basic principle:

C: You’re happy to co-habit?

B: I don’t want the ghost[s] to leave

C: Whether it’s –

B: – whether it’s good or bad... The capacity of life is not just good, and that’s what makes it. The pain, the hurt, the love, all these things are important... I want to live with the ghosts – they’re my neighbours

Rather than seeing the ghosts, as others have, as mere ‘house guests’, B affords them the respect of being equal ‘neighbours’. For others, there is even the fantasy of ‘companionship’:

M: Some people just live companionably with ghosts and just accept them, don’t they? [Laughs]... I suppose – there’s no point getting alarmed about it, really (CS7)

Similarly, Ch in CS2 describes the possibility of an ideal form of co-habitation with ghosts:

Ch: I do believe that people can – spirits and non-spirits like us can live very happily together, and you can sense a great feeling – warmth and security as well

She offers an example of a ‘best of all worlds’ scenario: the ghosts keep their distance whilst also looking out for the living inhabitants:

Ch: [In] my last flat, I was very comfortable. Because I felt that the spirits there were just going about their business. And I felt they were actually quite protective and they were minding me as such (CS2)

Engaging

There are times when the ghosts do seem to directly engage with participants. These moments may be downplayed where the overriding strategy is of distance not connection. Examples given above include eye contact in CS1, and R in CS4 imagining her ghost reacting in ‘real’ time. At other times, the idea of engagement is received neutrally. I got excited when I heard a further instance of eye contact, but the response by S in CS3 is ambiguous – she accepts my theory, but doesn’t elaborate:

S: He [a friend’s son] said he was kickboxing, and he happened to look, and this man was sitting there like this, with his finger on his chin, and he looked at M [the boy] and smiled. And M looked away, looked back, and he had gone

C: So they had eye contact, so there was an interaction?

S: Umm. Yeah

C: So he smiled. That’s interesting. Because some people think that ghosts aren’t ‘with us’, are a kind of replay of the past

S: Yeah. Yeah

C: The old man was aware?

S: Yeah

Nonetheless, she herself gives examples of trying to ‘set up’ situations for the ghosts to communicate, such as placing a paper and pen on the table next to the chair where the old man appeared. Similarly, R in CS4 tries to replicate a scenario described to her by someone who saw the ghost admiring jams piled up on a window sill:

R: I’ve made a lot of jams this summer and piled them up at the window to try to attract her... But it didn’t work

Another way to make connections is to interpret events as having personal meaning, most obviously where the ghosts are believed to be members of the family. In CS8, the

uncanny events which centre upon F manifest his close relationship with his grandmother. He can accept being ‘watched’ over by her, where in a different set of circumstances this might not be so comforting:

F: I quite like it in a way... Just knowing that she’s there, watching me. And everything I do

In CS9, V admits that if she didn’t believe the ghosts were family, she wouldn’t want them to stay:

V: I think if it hadn’t been family then I would have let [the medium] take them away

Instead, a strong family narrative has developed:

G: We do like them very, very much and we do miss them

C: How come you like them?

A: Because we know that they’re there

G: Yeah, and especially grandma

V: They’re looking after us, aren’t they?

A: They’re family

Elsewhere, there is a real sense of connection through the sharing of *home*. The primary example is R in CS4. In Chapter Three I noted the way in which a love of particular domestic materialities connects R to her ghost, ‘Annie’, and through her, to the past of the house. This aids a positive sense of shared co-habitation:

R: I am a sensation type. I like fabrics and jams and I think Annie was like that too... She’s harmless... She likes the same things as me

C: She can’t mean you any harm because she must recognise your similarities?

R: I just think – something like that. And we like to live alone. I love to be alone. And I’ll probably be found dead in my chair by the fire [like Annie was]. She couldn’t frighten me

The ghost is ‘like’ R – the ‘other’ rendered similar to self. The ghost appreciates R’s expression of domesticity, and is thus perceived to be more likely to accept her as co-habitee:

R: She was seen looking at the jams and her hands went up like this as she looked, in admiration

One of the ways R connects with her ghost as co-habitee, described above, is through her knowledge that the ghost, like her, lived *alone* for many years at the end of her life – it is, perhaps, telling that she can live with a ghost and still think of herself as living alone.

The Sharing of Ghost Narratives

As described in Chapter Three, the social dynamic between participants, their friends, family, colleagues and neighbours, is played out or enhanced in the act of telling the ghost stories; shared *memories* of events enhance relationships. During the interviews, I noted that in general people seemed to enjoy this aspect of living in a haunted home. This was particularly the case when relating experiences in a family or friendship group. Perhaps not being alone gives people more confidence and courage. There is also the enjoyment of the ‘public’ face of domesticity; telling the ghost stories allows glimpses into the interior, both geographically and socially, but there is usually a positive gloss placed on this. It is a form of display, closer to the way ghost stories are ‘performed’ in the tourist and heritage industry, rather than a revealing of private moments. Such a move confers ‘character’ on participants, by default of their association with a haunted home. The couple in CS1 ‘dine out’ on their stories:

C: Did you see this as an annoying aspect?

D: Oh no. It’s good after-dinner conversation

S in CS3 also enjoys the attention she receives from her work colleagues:

S: It's quite a topic of conversation at work for some reason... They were like... 'Can we come round?' And I was saying, 'Yes, if you want'. They were like, 'Wow! Wow!'... I think with any story, they're very interested to hear it

S's home becomes a place on the wider map. She herself believes there is a move to be less coy about one's ghosts, suggesting a re-emergence of this form of local folklore:

S: More and more people talk about it now. Because I think years ago people wouldn't talk about it. They'd just sweep it under the carpet

Some participants continue to be reticent about talking about their ghosts, such as P in CS2, who, as described, sees this as disrespectful. M in CS7 is particularly concerned not to speak of uncanny events to neighbours, and the couple in CS1 acknowledge that by speaking so openly they might make their house more difficult to sell when the time comes. But in general, as S suggests, there is a sense that talking about the ghosts confers certain social benefits, in the right time and place. Within the home, as described, there is a role in reinforcing relationships through recalling shared experience. Perhaps, like H's neighbour across the field in CS11, there is a need to tell the tale as a form of purging, or rendering it less unnerving by giving it an ordinary social context, where strategies of humour, infantilisation, domestication, containment, can be utilised in the act of creating narrative. On the one hand, then, the need to talk indicates the level of dis-ease associated with uncanny events. On the other hand, the process of telling ghost stories creates and reinforces close relationships, as well as informal wider networks. The social aspects of participants' lives perhaps becomes more important in the wake of the uncertain and the unknowable; there is a greater need to connect to tangible structures, processes and relationships.

Talking with the Ghosts

An important way in which participants engage with their ghosts is to talk to them. This is a one-way process, although there are incidences when a ghost *appears* to be communicating. The form that talking to ghosts generally takes is more akin to talking *at* them: participants don't expect – usually don't want – a response. There are times when there is a momentary frisson, an openness or genuine desire to communicate. At

other times, a command to back off. In general, talking is more a statement of fears or wishes as much as it is to do with actual communication, reflecting and externalising participants' relationships with the ghosts.

I noted, in the section on *not* talking, above, the complexity of such a strategy of distance; it can't be assumed that talking as such is always a strategy of connection. In CS11, as described, H compares her experience of *not* seeing her ghost with her neighbour's encounter with a monk by her kitchen door. She assumes that her neighbour's need to talk to her is a reflection of her anxiety about it. In contrast, H's daughter, who also hears the female ghost, reacts by refusing to engage at all:

H: And she put it out of her mind altogether, wouldn't talk about it... She just didn't want to talk about it at all

But there are multiple examples of talking to ghosts (or belief *they* are trying to talk), reinforcing an assumption (long held, as described in the first chapter) that ghosts are like people in that they might be able to communicate or understand in ordinarily *human* ways. Perhaps also, in the frequent absence of an actual visual experience, the spoken word becomes more important as a form of communication.

Ghosts speak to inhabitants

When an uncanny event involves hearing words, these are often names of householders being called. It is a tantalising sound, because it implies that communication *might* be possible. But if the word cannot quite be understood, it has the opposite effect; it emphasises instead the impossibility of real communication and reinforces that slight but significant distance from normality – the not-quite word spoken by a not-quite voice. In CS8 the ghost of the grandmother is heard to call R's name:

F: About two years after she died, she just like started shouting my name... It's loud. I'll be sat there, and my mum would be sat here, and I'll just hear, 'F!'

The communication goes no further: there are no other words heard, no message imparted. F's mother and sister have also heard F's name being called – but never their

own. This reflects family dynamics, as F's mother D was not close to her mother when she was alive. The ghost does also communicate in other ways, beyond words, through banal domestic acts, as described in Chapter Three. For example, F asks his grandmother to turn off the television while he's in bed:

D: I know one night he said: 'I was so tired in bed. The telly was on, I didn't feel like getting up and switching it off. I said, 'Oh, moma [grandmother], put the telly off'. He said, and the next thing, the telly just went off

Name calling is a repeated domestic pattern, a ritualised memory of the banal act of calling from one place in a house to another. But the calling of a name to attract attention merely reinforces the limited nature of the communication loop, never getting beyond first base. In CS5, M recalls how the 'Pink Lady' calls the name of her daughter, the one with the 'special relationship':

M: My daughter was cleaning upstairs, and I was cleaning downstairs. And then she comes downstairs, saying [annoyed voice], 'What it is you want to tell me?' And I said, 'How so?' 'Because you keep on calling me, and when I say, 'Yes, what it is mum?' You don't answer. And you call again. And I say, 'Yes, mum. What it is?' And you don't answer. What do you really mean by that?' She was very annoyed [laughs]. I said: 'Oh, my dear, I haven't called you, once'. And then, because her name is [a Finnish name], and the pronunciation is rather impossible for English people... I said, 'Obviously, you don't know if it was your Finnish-speaking mum – to call you, or somebody else who doesn't speak Finnish. And the pronunciation was so beautiful, so perfect, that you didn't hear any difference. He or she must be a very, very considerate and kind person!'

The daughter's name, although difficult to pronounce, is spoken perfectly by the disembodied voice. The ghost may not be Finnish, but is polite enough to make the effort to learn how to pronounce the name – another example of assuming shared social etiquette. This reinforces the narrative passed down by previous owners, that the ghost is kind and caring. It is also a protective gesture towards the daughter, seeing the positive in an uncanny event. The ghost is interpreted as trying to respectfully understand and communicate in their language, despite it being *they* who are the foreigners. There is also the sense that, by doing this, the ghost also respects *differences* between them.

Name-calling also occurs in CS3 and CS11. S in CS3 told me that her husband, J, had never experienced the ghosts. But, in passing, she mentioned he had heard his name being called, assuming his girlfriend was playing a joke. The event is not logged as something worth the category ‘uncanny’, such is its banal and ubiquitous nature within the domestic interior:

S: Sometimes [fiancé] J has come upstairs and said, ‘Why have you called me?’ And I’ll say, ‘I haven’t called you’. Or I’ll hear something calling me sometimes. Like a ‘S!’ [an urgent, staccato whisper] but there’s no one there. And he was convinced it was me playing a joke on him. But I’ve never done that, no

Hearing one’s name being called doesn’t always have the same purchase as other events: even footsteps get more attention. An exception is CS11, where the pivotal uncanny event involves hearing something being said. The details of the words are not quite understood, leaving a tantalising gap in understanding which has vexed the occupants since; another near-miss event, where what is heard is not quite heard – the words are fuzzy and distorted as if there is bad radio reception:

H: And this is where the strong whisper came up. It was definitely an urgent request for help. But what the lady said, I do not know. There was no real sound to it. The vocal chords didn’t kind of come into it [she demonstrates by whispering loudly]. But it must have been loud, because my husband heard it downstairs. And when I was backing down here, he was coming up. We sort of met here. And he said, ‘What do you want? What’s amiss?’ And I said: ‘It wasn’t me’

The two participants hear slightly different things. H interprets it as an attempt to communicate, and feels responsible because she can’t understand what was needed from her. She continues to attempt to translate a meaning from what she didn’t quite hear. Like her Finnish acquaintance’s daughter on the Wirral, H also reads the event in culturally specific ways. Here, the word she *thought* she heard is a female name, but it also means something else in Finnish:

H: What I thought she said was, ‘Anna!’ Anna is a girl’s name. But it’s also Finnish – ‘Give me!’ Now obviously there are no language barriers in these sort of – ghostly –

but I thought I was imagining this 'Anna' because it's a Finnish word as well. But since it didn't repeat itself and nothing happened, we couldn't get to grips with it

In contrast to H's inability to understand the ghost, the ghost is conferred superhuman powers – to be bilingual in *human* terms. There may be no 'language barriers', but the communication barrier is all too real. H finds meaning in what might have been said from her own personal background, but simultaneously she questions this line of thinking, accepting she might have imagined the word because the association was already in her head. The dual possibilities of meaning of the word reflect back her dual identity, as a Finnish woman living in the UK. Again, there is potentially an understanding – by the ghost – of difference, and a desire to connect. The fact that the near-communication is between two women plays into conventional notions of female ghosts as either vulnerable, in need, or caring and sensitive:

H: [Shakes her head] I'm just sorry that I didn't understand the question. You know, the language of the question... or what she actually said. But it was a very intense request for help, urgently

Inhabitants speak to ghosts

The assumption of the ghost's sensitivity as an extension of shared social values is replicated in H and A's own narrative as they try to recall their immediate responses to the event. It is interesting to explore a particular moment in the discussion, where they can't remember what they replied to the ghost at the time. They seem to back each other up in describing how they *would* have responded, suggesting a desire to present themselves as polite and dignified. H censors their memory of her response:

A: She replied also – to whoever had asked this question

C: You said?

H: I don't know. 'What do you want?'

A: You know, 'What do you want?' Or – 'What is it?'

H: 'What's the matter?'

A: Yep

H: 'What's the matter?' Probably. 'What do you want?' is rude. 'What's the matter?' I would have said. As I head down the ladder... A was coming up, saying, 'What's the matter?'

There is another example of a cry for help – but in this case, it is a householder appealing to a ghost – B in CS10 requesting to be ‘saved’ by a previous inhabitant from the angry ‘demon’:

B: I just thought, well, I said something like: 'Save me – A!'

As described, the appeal to a female is in contrast to the threat from a male – whose ‘voice’ he could hear coming towards his bedroom:

B: I heard roaring, shouting – great anger

C: Was it a man's voice?

B: Yes. It was a man. Very angry. Extremely nasty. And crazed

The former ghost, the famous historical figure of A, does not respond with words, but acts swiftly: words would have been useless in such an emergency. At another time, B also uses words strategically. He doesn't talk directly to a ghost, but lets the ghost know *he* knows she is around. This strategy might allow him to take control of the situation – stating his knowledge aloud as a way of projecting his confidence. The ghost, in turn, makes vocal sounds – laughter. Perhaps the fact that this is a jolly-sounding female takes away any unease that a ghost in his private flat might otherwise create:

B: I was in my flat [within the house], and I was chatting with my brother, then there was a presence of a woman in the flat. Laughter. Someone giggling. Almost like, not a mocking laughter, but sort of like – having fun. Near me. Giggle. And I just talked to my brother about it, in real time. 'This is happening. Someone is here in my flat, laughing. They're giggling'. And I kind of made the ghost aware of it. But I – didn't feel threatened... I was almost amused by it

At other times, B finds himself talking aloud to the ghosts, not in response to a particular event, but to reinforce his sense of himself within the house:

B: I have to stand up to the history and say: 'I'm B. I'm here. Notice me'. I'm standing up for myself

There are other times when people speak in order to assert territorial needs, often reactions to an infringement of space:

Ch: And I used to feel the swish of a skirt over my face... Eventually I had to ask them to stop

C: And did they?

Ch: Sometimes (CS2)

R in CS4 talks to her ghost in a rather more intimate way, acting as if the ghost can hear and respond. This move is both about connection and containment; again about taking control of the situation:

R: I've got this picture over the kitchen table, which is a painting of fruit I did when I was fifteen. I go out to karate, and come back, and the damn thing's hanging sideways – it's on such a slant. And I just had to say: 'Annie, please. You know, really, this is outrageous'

R tells the ghost off, but there is something familiar in her manner, fitting with the way the uncanny is 'familiarised', the ghost domesticated. R's mother also talks to the ghost, but in an effort to soothe her:

R: Oh, my mum's talked to her. She said – I think once we came in and the pictures were everywhere – 'Anne, don't worry, it's all right. No one's going to hurt your house'. My mum said it so nicely... 'Annie, stop worrying, it's alright'. My mother's... like Mary Whitehouse, frosty schoolmistress, you know... It was so sweet. 'Don't worry. Nobody's going to disturb your lovely house'

In contrast, there is sometimes even camaraderie with the ghosts against outsiders. In CS13, S, who is a garden worker and also the owner's son's girlfriend, said she dealt with the feeling of being watched by things 'unseen' by talking to them 'as if they were alive'. She added that she was often 'in cahoots' with the ghosts against the ghost hunters who pay money to go on tours. One time when the ghost hunting visitors were

looking around the place, S ‘sensed’ the ghosts at the bottom of the tower staircase, and said to them:

S: ‘They’re at the top of the stairs, so if you want to avoid them, stay down here’

– whereupon she was convinced she heard laughter. This imagined communication serves to reinforce her insider status. In CS9, the ghosts are insiders *par excellence* – they are family. In particular, the mother and eldest daughter speak poignantly about the conversations they have with their dead grand/mother. The frustration that these are probably one-way is keenly felt. The uncanny events – such as footsteps, doors opening and closing, the doorbell ringing, electronic equipment turning on and off – do not communicate anything in particular. The following discussion starts hopefully – with the possibility that the grandmother can hear the eldest daughter’s words/thoughts and respond ‘in her own little way’. But it ends with an admission of disappointment and sadness:

A: I know now that because grandma is here, if I ever get upset or anything, I can go to my room and I can just talk to myself because I know she can hear me. And in her own little way, she can answer me back

C: Does she ever answer you back?

A: I don’t know, it’s a bit weird, because I don’t know whether it’s me kind of like talking to myself in my head or it is her answering me back. I can never properly tell whether it’s grandma or it’s just me

C: Do you ever talk to her directly, out loud?

V: I do

A: I do

C: What kind of things do you say?

V: [V starts to look sad, slightly emotional] How we’re feeling and stuff. You know. If we’ve had a bad day, you know. How we miss her, not being here to be able to talk, to have a proper conversation. Or on the phone, talking about it. If she wasn’t here, she was always on the phone

A: If the phone rings, it was always like, ‘I’ll get it. It’ll be grandma’. Then you just know, ‘No, it’s not’. Cos she’s not around anymore. Used to be, everyday, we’d at least get five phone calls from her!

C: It was quite recently really that she – went

V: Two years this May

C: Yeah - So, the fact that it's still sad, even though you feel she's still with you -

V: It's reassuring, yes. Yeah. That she's still here

C: But the sadness when you talk to her is about not having a –

V: Yeah. Yeah. Have the conversation back that we used to

C: But when you [V] speak to her, do you sometimes get a response in other ways?

V: Um. [Pause] I don't know

A: It's weird, isn't it?

V: Yeah

A: Because you can never tell whether it's just you talking to yourself, answering your questions, or it is her really

C: [to V] Do you get that?

V: Yeah

G: And sometimes when we talk about it, it makes me upset. Because I miss her really, really much

The gentle, internal conversations try to replicate habits of communication, but they can never be sure if the grandmother talks back or if the conversation is imagined. The frustration this causes is reinforced whenever the telephone rings. The moment of initial forgetfulness that it cannot be the grand/mother, as it so often would have been, makes such an ordinary domestic event take on its own uncanny resonance. The repetition of normal routines becomes a jarring reminder of change; the mundane act of the telephone ringing is displaced by a sudden remembrance of loss.

At times, people also expose ambiguity towards their ghosts when they recall what they have said, or imagine what they would say. S in CS3 offers one of the most positive narratives, but, as described, sometimes shows insecurity ('And I just think, hope, they're fine with what we've done'). She describes what she might ask if she could communicate with the ghosts:

S: 'Are you fed up with what we're doing?!'

Communication again is one-sidedness. No discussion, negotiation, or shared understanding is possible. S is left speaking her anxiety into the air. The openness of the

narrative here is about a lack of a *response* from the ghosts to clarify her reading of the situation.

PART C: NEGOTIATING SELF-SPACE

Having surveyed the various ways in which participants co-habit with ghosts and deal with the self-other relationship, the chapter concludes with four examples of individual responses to the ghosts in context. These illustrate the spectrum of attitudes and relationships with a particular emphasis on the challenges participants encountered.

P (CS2): Giving Away Power

P repeatedly speaks of a lack of ‘occupation’ of her flat. A constant theme is her sense of frustration; despite legal ownership, she feels no *sense* of ownership. This at times was expressed through the materiality of the apartment, as she fails to furnish it as intended:

P: I'm hardly here myself, you see... I mean psych – occupying this house. I don't know how much of this house... is mine. I suppose I had lots of fantasies about what life would be like in this house. And they were very, very positive. And very exciting. And I love the space. But from the day that I moved in, I wondered if I did totally occupy the space. And there are things that I haven't done... I had ideas I was going to do all sorts of things... My occupation [of the flat] seems hazy I think. I feel like I'm not entirely in this house

Even her bedroom downstairs is ‘uninhabited’:

P: This room – it's such a beautiful room. I love it so much. I mean in the summer, you've got the trees coming right up here, I love the big windows, it's got a big high ceiling, very light and – and I do – I love this room. But I feel this is the room I've least inhabited in the house

In contrast:

P: I've had that feeling [of belonging] in places that I've rented or lived in very short term

C: So it's nothing to do with actual legal ownership?

P: No, no. Or length of time. I remember when I was a student, I lived in squats that felt so mine... Even hotel rooms, I've made them – quite mine

P speculates about why she feels so disappointed about not 'owning' the flat. She suggests it relates to a sense of guilt about being in the privileged position to do so. Ownership also comes with the burden of expectation, a pressure to fulfil a fantasy of happiness ('I suppose I was worried about some kind of disappointment'). Home becomes a place where one *should* be able to most fully be oneself, especially if you own it and can 'put down roots'. The failure is subtle, and a personal one: not to connect, not to belong, not to 'embody' the flat as a home. She hints at an ultimate distancing strategy ('I think my solution will be just to move on, not to engage').

The ghosts symbolise a more general form of personal alienation. Their Jewishness reminds her of an unexplored, repressed element of her family's past. For P, Jewishness is already a metaphor for ghostliness:

P: It was funny [the ghosts] are Jewish. I thought, that is the unexplored, ghostly side – The house is definitely Jewish, which is maybe a bit of an unresolved part of myself... My Jewish family are ghosts to me because they pretended not to be Jewish, and they pretended not to be German

The centrality of the ghosts' Jewish identity also suggests to P that the house might have a negative energy or history – there is a projection of the idea of trauma onto the ghosts because of her own, personal, family background, which she acknowledges:

P: And I know this is a Jewish house, and I know it's quite a tormented house

C: Why do you think tormented?

P: My background, I suppose. But, you know, why else would ghosts remain?

Despite this, P accepts the ghosts as an *intrinsic* aspect of the space. She imagines herself in a protective role:

P: I see them as being very vulnerable... and needing of protection somehow from me

C: How can that happen?

P: To keep the peace for them. To not disturb them... I felt a tremendous responsibility for protecting their space actually, for protecting them from intrusion

But a tension emerges. She next suggests the ghosts have *more rights* over the space, reasoning that they have been in the flat longer, have nowhere else to go, and are ‘comfortable’:

P: My feeling is they have every right to be here. And I never wanted to challenge their right to be here... or make them feel uncomfortable even, because I actually think that the people [ghosts] I’ve seen on the stairs really, truly belong here, belong here much more than I do

At first she is keen to separate the presence of the ghosts from her own relationship with her flat, wanting to take personal responsibility for her failure to connect rather than blame the presence of ghosts (‘something in *me*’):

P: I think it’s a habit of mine, not to take up too much space. I’m always conscious of taking, of intruding on other people – so conscious of it that of course I never do that...

C: So is there any sense in which you are uneasy about co-habiting with a family of ghosts?

P: In some way I’m not. In some ways I’m not. I wondered if – I don’t think that’s what makes me feel less – that I have less of a right to be here, but there is something in me that stops me taking up the space in a way that I imagined that I would. And it’s quite strong. It is strong. It’s quite disappointing

When questioned further, her uneasy habitation becomes more complexly inflected: a subtle causal relationship between her respect for the ghosts’ rights and her own issues around ownership. She does not believe her respect for the ghosts is mutual (‘Well it’s their space. I don’t think they would be polite to me’), and finally admits an element of competitive struggle to co-habit:

P: I don't think it's because of the ghosts. But it seems strange that I am very aware that they're here... and I feel respectful of their space... It's sharing the space. And not feeling I have any rights over them. It's not that I have a – stronger claim over the place than they do... And, you know, maybe why I'm trying to be so respectful of them. Maybe I really don't want to upset them. [Speaks slower] Perhaps I don't want them to have more rights than me – in this place... I think in my ideal home there wouldn't be any questions of my occupation, or competition. I don't think

Ch (CS2): Tussles with a Ghost

Ch in CS2's story is of an unusually intense relationship with one particular ghost – a teenage girl, aged she believes between fourteen and seventeen years. The dynamic is akin to a rival sibling or a close competitor, and it is not a pleasant relationship but a tussle of two strong personalities, each claiming space for themselves. Ch believes that it is this girl who keeps her parents as ghosts in the flat:

Ch: I don't think the parents are that pushed one way or another who's in the house, who isn't in the house. I feel like they're focusing around the girl

But there is a suggestion that being 'sensitive' might make the ghosts particularly interested in Ch:

Ch: They made it very difficult for me. They tormented me when I moved in here to find out who I was... I didn't sleep very well and it was very difficult initially

Ch sleeps in the room where she believes the girl died. The ghosts are seen or felt just outside the door to this bedroom. Ch describes being made to feel that she is trespassing:

Ch: When I first moved in I felt I was in her room, in her bed, and she didn't want me there... I just had the feeling, you know, of being not wanted – in the room... I felt she was always standing at the bottom of my bed, looking down at me, at night time. Almost willing me out of the room... I think it's very territorial. I think it's very much about her room and – she doesn't want to go

There is no sympathy for this ghost's plight – she is characterised negatively as a person:

Ch: I feel she's a real spoilt little girl. And I think she's an only child... And maybe, you know, she doesn't like me. And that's perfectly fine... I almost feel that – she's not a nice person

C: Because, or despite being a ghost?

Ch: No, no. I just think she's not a nice person in herself. And I think she's very spoilt. And I think she would be one of these people who would throw you out of the bed, if she could. You know, one of those people who are not fundamentally nice people

In contrast to her flatmate, Ch stands her ground, believing she has the right not to have to share her bedroom with a ghost – not least because she's *alive*, and the girl is dead. It is a temporal as much as a spatial argument: this is *her* time, not the ghost's:

C: It's interesting that you're invading her space, you think she's invading yours

Ch: Well if she's dead that's – you know, she's dead! She should move on! [Laughs] I mean if you think of it like that, you know, she's the one who needs to move on. And it's very sad that she can't, but at the end of the day she's dead... It's my time now. Ok, your time was short-lived, and I'm very sad about that. However, you need to just move on

This denial of place, ownership, or respect to the ghost is a distancing strategy, and it is also a moral stance for Ch, who, as described, believes good ghosts keep a respectful distance, know their place, and understand the need for boundaries. Even the parents are described as battling to contain their wilful child:

C: What sense of the parents do you get?

Ch: Very placid, easy-going people. I never feel nervous about them... Very benign, very laid back, they have no – interest in us... Sometimes I even think... feel that they are trying to keep her in – tow as much as they can. You know, keep her in line... letting her do what she wants really. But at the same time trying to keep her under some control

C: So if they weren't there –

Ch: She might be even worse, yeah... They're trying to keep her as much in line – manners is what it is basically. 'You don't go round waking people up in the middle of the night. Behave yourself'

But in an interesting twist, Ch admits that the clash of 'personalities' between her and the ghost might be due more to their similarities than differences:

C: So in a sense – it's a bit of a – stand off?

Ch: Yeah. About who's going to win

C: Is that how you see it?

Ch: Yeah, I do. I feel very much that she's so – petulant... that she needs to just go away

C: It's surprising that you stuck it out

Ch: Well, I suppose it's that balance, that battle of wits – who's going to win. I'm the youngest child too. And I'm very spoilt in my own way. So it's like – you know

C: You're just as petulant?

Ch: Yeah

C: You're a match for her!

Ch: And I just feel, 'You're dead. You go away'

Ch's strategy is to 'block' the girl out – a dangerous move because she believes the ghost craves attention and hates to be ignored. But she cannot afford to communicate with her, because this might give the ghost 'power':

Ch: I did feel that if I attempted to communicate with her that she would gain feeling – that she could invade my space even more... I suppose what I'm afraid of is if I open up any bit to her she'd completely invade me

C: Would she have that much power?

Ch: I think they can. They can really torment you

Clearly for Ch the co-habitation has become a battle rather than a negotiation, but success or failure in absolute terms is impossible to judge. Ch only moved into the flat as a stop-gap ('it was always supposed to be temporary for me anyway'). She felt she could tough it out until it suited her to move on. But there is a final hint that the co-habitation might have failed if her circumstances were different:

Ch: [Almost whispering] I think if I – obviously this is confidential – if I was staying in the house long term, and if P allowed me, I would bring someone in that house. I think there's just too much activity... I would definitely ask a rabbi or someone to come in... I don't know if I could put up with it if I were there long term. Like if I didn't know P, she wasn't a friend of mine – and we just rented a flat, probably by now I would have moved out

Some time after the completion of the interviews, she did indeed move out, but not, she claimed, because of the ghost.

T (CS6): 'Accommodating' Ghosts and Landladies

This example concerns a woman who is paid to stay in a room with a troublesome male ghost. T's outsider status in this 'home' is particularly apparent in her relationship with her landlady. She is a cleaner by day. She rents a bedsit on a busy road, above a shop, where she cooks, keeps her belongings, and puts up her daughter when she visits from Romania. In the evenings, except when the owner – a widow in late middle-age – is away, she arrives at a large detached house in an exclusive area of North London, and stays the night in one particular room. T makes light of the arrangement because it suits her to, dwelling on it as a practical rather than an emotional one, as described. But there is a hint of ambivalence:

T: I'm free. I'm free but I'm not free, because it's like a job. You can't leave the house. I'm not free there, so I'm not free... I live only in the house. I can't go out with a friend or come later... But I don't mind. I don't go out. I don't have time. I'm busy, busy

She is a 'captive' in the house overnight. Having a social life is a luxury she can't afford. Survival means constantly being at other people's beck and call. Her life is not her 'own' and the arrangement is merely an extension of this:

T: I never use [the kitchen], never in two years... I like having my own stuff. I eat what I like at home. Nobody make me restriction

This case study is about variations on the notion of 'strangeness' and the 'stranger'. Relations with both the landlady and the ghost are about distance and oblique communication. The only intimate gestures are unwanted – from the male ghost in the bedroom. T only understands the situation when she overhears a conversation between the landlady and another woman:

T: And [the landlady] says: 'Oh, you are lucky, you are alone in the house, because I hear noises and I'm scared'. So that's the truth, why she employ me to sleep over night. She said: 'You're lucky to live alone. I can't'

The landlady's evening domestic routine is dependent on T:

T: She's out a long time. But when she comes at ten o'clock, or after ten o'clock, she's frightened to go alone in the house. And I must wait at the front door to go together in. She calls me all the time. 'T, in fifteen minutes I'm home'. Or twenty. Or ten. Or whatever. 'I'll wait for you'. Every day she phone me to come to her. And she tells me what time to be there

Despite this, there is a line of communication that T cannot cross:

T: She has more bad experience in the house with this, but she don't talk, you know [Romanian]

O: Mother can't but guess what other experiences the lady has had with this spirit in the house. She doesn't know and it's not something you can talk about over tea. It's kind of hard for the lady to admit, you know

T: And if I start talking, you know, it's more bad for her than for me. Maybe we live like this and see what happens in the future

T accepts the need to maintain distant formality. But eventually, after a particularly bad night, she confronts her:

T: The next day I saw the lady. I said: 'Look, lady, last night somebody snoring in my bed. It was so clear'. And she said: 'Oh, maybe the neighbour'. But the neighbour's house is far away. And it is the side of the toilet, and nobody sleep in the toilet. It was so clear. And I tell her: 'Look, I'm not scared. I'm not frightened. I don't care what I hear,

you know. I'm not frightened'. And then she says: 'The last two years you're here in my house, I'm more quiet'. So, she has more peace [Romanian]

O: When my mother's sleeping there, [the owner's] more peaceful. She's more able to sleep. She was so anxious before

C: So you're taking the brunt of the ghost's activity

O: Yes!

T: She says she'd go very late in the bed, this lady. Three or four o'clock in the morning, because she's frightened to go to sleep. Because she hears something strange in the house... After I tell her I hear somebody snoring, and I tell her, 'I don't care, maybe it's a ghost'. And make like a joke. But she says: 'Yeah. It's true'

Making a joke allows events to be downplayed. Here it is particularly important to do so in the context of T's relationship with the landlady. T 'accommodates' her employer. Showing both an understanding and lack of concern about the situation, the landlady relaxes into an admission. T's public role is to allay the landlady's fears, to take on a particular persona, to be emotionally detached from the ghost in order that the landlady can be too. At one point, she is praised:

T: And she said: 'Oh thank you, T. You're so positive. You give me courage'

The social and economic reality is T's lowly position. She is paid cash and has no legal contract of employment. T humours her employer, her natural sensitivity to the situation ('I don't want to frighten her') tempered perhaps by the knowledge that she must give her what she wants. But there is some subtle power gained by the landlady's fear. Early on in the arrangement, the landlady went back on a promise to pay her more money to stay at weekends. T had to confront her:

T: She put it up so I don't leave her. From that point I knew it, she needs me, she wants me, you know. She so easily, quickly paid

If playing down her own fears to the landlady is a strategic move, what of her feelings about the ghost? Her relationship focuses around the question of how far to attempt communication. She uses one-way speech to assert boundaries:

T: Honestly, when I go home, I say, 'I'm here. Don't scare me!' Sometimes, another night, I hear noise in another room... I say, 'Ok. You scare me. Enough. I'm here'

She already accepts as a given her lack of personal space. But she talks to the ghost, asserting herself to keep him in check:

T: I says: 'I don't care what you move in this house. I need a job. And I don't leave the house!'... Because then I lose the job, you know? If you start to be frightened, you collapse only, you can't go on like that

C: Are you frightened?

T: I try not be... because, if O says, 'Maybe he needs help' and I like help people. I like to help people

C: So you're almost becoming a – mother to the ghost?

O: I think this is all my fault. Because when she told me, I was like, 'Ok. Maybe he's just trying to draw attention because he wants something from you'. So from that moment on, mummy started to say: 'Ok, I know you're here and ok, so what do you want from me? What can I do for you?'

T: I'm not ready for this

O: She's not really ready for that

T: Not yet

O: But she's trying to accept it

T: Ok. I say: 'I'm here. Don't scare me!' It sounds crazy

Her daughter argues that if she found out what the ghost wants, it might leave her alone. This is not using communication as an act of connection, but rather a reaching out in order to withdraw, with the goal of gaining privacy. But T is afraid of a two-way encounter:

T: O says, 'If you could hear the snoring, you can hear what is talked'. It is possible they can talk?... I'm scared to try to talk with it

C: You don't want to talk?

T: I wish. No. I wish. Honestly I wish. But still I am afraid

Her strategy is rather not to ignore it, but to wilfully, consciously, carry out her domestic routines. There is a stoical acceptance here based on familiarity with the situation:

C: Did you manage to sleep with the snoring?

T: After I put higher TV, maybe to cover it [Romanian]

O: She said she tries to go on knowingly. She doesn't try to ignore it. She acknowledges it is there. But she tries not to be bothered by it. By the ghost. She takes it as it is. 'Ok. You're here. I'm here. This is my job. I don't have to be scared because now I sort of know you'

The boundary she is negotiating is with herself: to acknowledge the reality of the situation, and not give in to it. She accepts her daughter's argument that the ghost 'needs' something – this comforts her, because it suggests vulnerability rather than power. But *she* needs to maintain distance, deferring into the future any possibility of seeking two-way communication. Playing down her fears and anxieties about the situation to her landlady, and perhaps to herself, is a successful enough strategy of co-habitation in a difficult set of circumstances.

B (CS10): Performing his Place

A tension runs through CS10: an oscillation between B's sense of belonging, and the weight of the house's own complex agency. As described in Chapter Three, B comes to a house with a long history, big character, and tough charisma. He has to fit in, respect the house and ghosts rather than immediately impose his own stamp. But he also wants to make his mark as the house's new guardian. This is an ongoing and intense negotiation. At times the co-habitation seems to be on a knife-edge, taking up all of his energy and will; at others, he talks emotionally about contributing to the house's energies rather than fighting them.

It is particularly important for him to feel 'accepted' by the house. This is his interpretation of a 'pivotal' uncanny event, described elsewhere, where he is rescued by a benign female ghost:

B: At first I felt – not an imposter – but that I had to earn my place here. [Describes event] It was almost like testing myself to see whether I was accepted in the house. Whether somebody would protect me. Whether I was part of the house... I thought: 'I'm part of the house. They've accepted me as a person who will look after them and respect them. The history of the house... who'll be a positive energy for the house, a positive force'. I felt I had been tested

The event dramatises his belief that he had earned this, like a rite of passage. He now could see himself in a heroic role of providing a 'positive force' for the house. But if B is the house's new guardian, its protector, he also needs protecting from its darker forces. The event, by its nature, suggests he cannot depend on all the ghosts accepting him. It is clear there is a tension here:

B: I suppose I would suspect there are ghosts who are not very harmful and others that are

C: So there's still always a – darker side?

B: It's not gone away. I know it's always there ready to come out. These demons, these figures, are, to me, I see [pause] – I don't actively think about this every day. I don't want you to think that. I'm not like obsessed... I mean I do project some confidence in the house generally, but there is a deeper thing going on. It's a layer of myself which is aware of this, you know, that I'm discussing

According to B, the demon he was rescued from is still in the house. But he checks himself, playing down any impression that he is 'obsessed' with this fact. It is a deeper 'layer' of himself which knows what the house contains, by which I assume he means a subconscious awareness, a part of him more in tune with the subtler energies of the house. But this also suggests it is a part of him that he can't control.

Despite his sense of belonging, he is in awe of the house and needs to be respectful of it. He even says he is aware that talking about its darker side might sound disrespectful, but decides he is 'still talking with love for the house'. This seemed an expression of unease: a sense that the process of gaining acceptance hadn't yet been completed. And despite wanting to help maintain the central *positive* atmosphere of the home, he quickly returns to thoughts of the demons within it:

B: Yes. That's [the positive atmosphere's] what I want to maintain. Because I do not want to be terrorised! [Nervous laughter] – by these demons. And I know that they wait, lurking in every cupboard and corner of the house, possibly to – undermine, maybe not like what I'm doing... I'm standing up for myself

His response to the darker side of the house is defiance. He has to 'stand up to' the ghosts, like Ch in CS2. He does this by 'performing' his sense of confidence in his belonging to the house, which is activated particularly through domestic activity. For example, he reinforces his subjectivity by a ritual of walking through the house in the dark at night. The feeling that he would be 'lost' if he allowed himself to feel fear is similar to T in CS6, who can't afford to be afraid or she might 'collapse'. Boundaries must be enforced:

B: As I would walk through the house at night, I – if I got nervous in the house, I'm lost. If I lose my – my life force, my power, my confidence in the house, then – I'm lost to the house. I'm out, I'm gone. I have to walk the house in a way like – the beacon, like the energy of the house. I'm holding the baton. I say what goes... I have to stand up to the history and say, 'I'm B. I'm here. Notice me'

C: And does it become natural – to stand up for yourself?

B: No, I need to conjure up energy. Sometimes I feel a bit low, so I – I know that that may be the – weak point. That may be a moment when my guard is down, that things may happen. And I have to fight that, you know. It's almost like fighting the fear

Here strategies cannot remain just spoken narratives, but must be intrinsic to the physical fabric and dynamic of the house as a material presence; B must *physically* perform his confidence:

B: I know I'm weak at times –

C: Times you have to be on your guard –

B: Times I have to be on my guard... I've had moments when I've walked – after that [pivotal event] – walked through the house in the dark

C: Why would you want to do that?

B: Well, I know this house... It's like a tester for me, that I can walk without fear through the house – striding out through the house without fear, feeling that I'm not

going to be pushed around [laughs]. If I become weak, fearful of the house, of my place, if I lose my confidence in my life here, I cannot live here

C: Are there times when you've felt unnerved?

B: I do, yes. That is, I have moments like that, yes. And I have to shake – I have to fight them. I've got to say, 'No way'. I cannot – if I don't overcome this fear – be in charge of this house – I am in charge of it... But if anyone messes with me, any of these ghosts mess with me, and I lose confidence, faith in myself, then I've lost. They've beat me. All these historical figures who might not want me here, you know

His striding performs an intimate knowledge of the physical space like M in CS5. It is the practical, material, knowing of a caretaker. B meets the immaterial forces within the house by asserting his sense of and knowledge of its materiality. This is the foundation of his relationship, after eight years in the job. But it is in his private moments, not in his public role as a caretaker, that he has to be on guard:

B: It's not to the general public. It's to the house itself. I have to stand that, walk like that. In my privacy. It's not a public display. It's a private charge, force, I have to hold up

A 'private charge': a private self, different to a self that has privacy. Such a self is created through relationship with the house. The compensation is the privilege of enjoying the house and its grounds in *its* privacy, as described. A distinction is made between the space open to the public and the space when the public has gone home. The private transformation of the grounds of the house, in particular, are described in poetic, romantic, terms. The private self is both more *real*, and more magical:

C: When everybody goes home, and you're alone in the house, do you change at that point?

B: I do relax very much into the house, and I can enjoy the house. It's the same as the park... It seems like the – the personality, the character of the park, character of the space, is lost when the public are here... In its privacy the park [and house]... can be – what it wants

By extension, B also has 'found' himself in the house. There is a lot at stake for him. The house is a home, and a job, and a life-line. He had been down on his luck, living in 'one room with a hole in the roof'. He had been made redundant, suffered a relationship

breakup, been 'almost on the street'. He cried when offered the job: a turning point in his life. The house is a lynchpin, initiating deep changes within him. He no longer 'hides' from life, and revels in being at the centre of a community:

B: I've changed as a person. I've developed. I've grown – generally, dealing with people. I've been in the job, I've turned into a different person... If you're engaged with life a lot, are positive and undefended, and always show your face, not hide away from the world, then you will get rewards. And it's a very public place. I have to be public here. It's a very public job in a way. Despite living here by myself, everybody knows me and wants something from me

The 'public' face of B is effective and positive, one which connects to others. The private connection he feels with the house has challenged him to 'stand his ground', sharpened his confidence. There is a complex and symbiotic relationship between the public and private, but it is not without its tensions. The benefits of co-habitation come at a price he is willing to pay.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the main conditions by which people manage to co-habit with the immaterial inhabitants with whom they often assume they share their home. I have suggested that this primarily involves 'strategies' for navigating experiences through different forms of attitude, interpretation and belief. These strategies show the ways in which people seek, ultimately, to maintain a positive relationship with their home, one which reinforces a sense of self rather than threatens it. It highlights the processes by which people seek coherence for their experiences and to 'contain' them in various ways.

Living in an uncanny home environment, as described in the previous chapter in relation to the home itself, requires a negotiation of the strange within the familiar, offering a set of challenges at a personal level. The presence of a ghost, it is assumed, might inhibit people's ability to express themselves, and lead to a restriction of personal space. I myself started this project with a set of embedded notions about what it must be like to live in an archetypal 'haunted house'. These suggested it might well be difficult

to view such a place as a 'home', in contrast to the set of ideal feelings often associated with it: belonging, ownership, privacy, safety, and security. To a large extent, this project aimed to contribute to the growing set of literatures which questioned such ideals, building on Sharon Marcus's influential work on the haunted house story broadcasting the 'urban deformation of the domestic ideal' (Marcus, 1999:116), and scrutinising such a symbolic failure within a modern-day context.

Wider literatures also point to a close relationship between people's sense of *self* and sense of home, as described. For Clare Cooper Marcus (1995), for example, the self is reflected in the objects of home. Tuan (1977) and other phenomenologists, writing predominantly in the 1970s, assumed the distinction between public and private selves, reinforcing the idea of the domestic interior as a place where the private self can come into being. Although, as described, it is an unfashionable stance in relation to work to break down public-private boundaries, this notion does seem to persist. Participants often spoke of some places being more private than others, and implied that these needed guarding to allow them a freedom to 'be' *themselves* without being overlooked or on display. The fact that anyone actually continues to live in a haunted home under such conditions might, then, seem surprising – putting aside financial and other personal circumstances which constrain some participants, and the fact, as discussed, my case studies might not reflect the worst case scenarios. Despite these caveats, the majority of people I interviewed did, indeed, call their haunted houses 'home'. I came to realise that, in general, people managed the relationship with their 'ghosts' or anomalies with a certain level of (for me) unexpected ease. Perhaps this is because the uncanny, as suggested in Chapter Three, is often as mundane as it is strange. In this chapter, it is the *ghost* that is rendered mundane in different ways, not just the uncanny events themselves. And despite the cultural expectation, outlined above, that living with a ghostly 'other' would be at the least inhibiting, this is not always the case. The experience of being haunted sometimes offers even positive benefit, and the ghost is rarely caricatured as unhappy or malevolent.

Looking more closely, I noticed that the stories people told about their experiences of home, of *haunted* home, of descriptions of specific events, appeared to depend on a set of interpretations, beliefs, rationalisations, embroiled within an underlying set of hopes, desires and ideals, about home and about self. Ghosts communicate rather obliquely, leaving narrative gaps. This offers leeway for householders to fill in the gaps in the way

they interpret the events they experience. The narratives employed by participants are like complex and careful ‘tool kits’ for handling experience: for this reason I came to describe them as ‘strategies’. Despite the wide range of contexts and responses, strategies utilised by people in negotiating their cohabitation seemed to fall into clear categories, and I drew these similar themes together. I call these tools ‘strategies’ because they are creative means by which people find ways of making the best of their situation. They cover a range of emotional and mental states within the differentiated geographies of the haunted home; they also suggest ways in which the emotional and mental states of the *ghosts* are interpreted strategically. Such a negotiation is, then, only really possible because it is one-sided: with little information, a lack of multi-dimensionality of being, and an avoidance of normal communication to pinpoint precise cause/effect rationales, the ghosts can be recreated in the minds and imaginations of participants in ways which, firstly, diminish their potential power and threatening otherness, and, secondly, allow for the maintenance of space for the self-at-home.

In her discussion of the way ‘others’ shape ‘selves’, Ahmed suggests, as described, that we deal with the ‘other’ by giving it a recognisable form: ‘In the gesture of recognising the one that we do not know, the one that is different from ‘us’, we flesh out the beyond, and give it a face and form’ (Ahmed, 2000b: 3). This idea repeatedly resonated throughout the interview process. It became a central motif out of which other themes developed. Certainly, participants may not always desire to see the actual ‘face and form’ of their ghost too distinctly. But their ability to feel at home in their haunted home often depended on how they could ‘shape’ the ghosts’ own immaterial bodies, in an uncertain, and for that, safe – and, indeed, liminal – place somewhere between ‘reality’ and ‘imagination’. This ‘shaping’ is a process of making ‘known’ or knowable – to make that which is different, similar *enough* to me and you, within the bounds of normality – in the sense of creating a something or, more often, a *someone* – who is recognisable on some cognitive or emotional level. This process is implicated in a desire to make ‘normally human’, to create a personhood for the uncanny events, however indistinct they appear to be. This is another way in which the ‘otherness’ of the other, the strangeness, becomes ‘familiarised’. A *someone* is more understandable, more potentially containable, than a *something*. It is a process of making the other *into* the same, at least, giving it a similar imagined *form*, into which personality, motivation, intention and emotional capacity might be vaguely filled. If one can know the measure

of the ghost, somehow trace its boundaries, its immaterial bodily outlines, one can *place* it, thus 'put it in its place'.

This process is successfully completed through a tacit attitude of containment through superiority; the ghost is domesticated. It becomes at best a limited form of immaterial humanness, at worst, something less than human, with limited agency, like a domestic pet. Any hint or fear of supernatural capacities or unearthly powers are more easily subdued by narrative strategies of belittlement, mockery or affectionate naming. At its best, this is a strategy of infantilisation and, tellingly, of feminisation.

The picture *is* sometimes very distinct – as in the obvious case of an actual sighting of a ghost – but more often allows leeway for participants to imagine their ghosts in ways which suit them. A sound or a smell, out of context with its surroundings, leaves a trail towards the imaginary construction of a 'human' form. Encounters offer fragments to be picked up and pieced together into a whole. People fill in the details, 'flesh out' the ghosts in ways which they believe to be most appropriate. The level and type of communication possible also becomes important in the process of examining, understanding, and tacitly attempting to create or influence the ghostly 'other'. The degree to which people attempted or blocked potential communication became part of their strategies for dealing with the ghosts. But either way, there was an assumption of likeness – that communication must be of the 'human' kind, despite frustration when this proved limited or impossible.

If the 'other' is domesticated and granted a similar form (or the same social skills and moral framework), this suggests a deeply *humanistic* response, where the self is central and has an ability to, or desire to, create the world in its own image. The assumption is often that there is a contract based on *mutual* understanding of the rules of co-habitation, and this requires that the 'other' does, indeed, become at least similar to the self *where it matters*.

This is further reinforced by an assumption that *distance* is possible between co-habitees. As described, much recent work (such as by Bondi, 2005) has focused on ways in which the 'subject' or self is constructed through a variety of social, cultural, technological and geographical contexts. But, as I have suggested, there is less work on the way in which people attempt to *reinforce* their subjectivity – their sense of

distinctiveness – in response to a given set of circumstances within particular places. This is what many participants seem to need to do. Brennan (2004) and others describe the way boundaries as well as binaries work to separate and distinguish, but they do so in order to critique such a project as an intrinsically false state of being. They assume, for example, that defensive barriers to ward off the affects of others, in the right conditions, should be replaced by a celebration of interconnected and interdependent relations.

Certainly there is perhaps no surprise in discovering that the more threatening and unknowable the ‘other’, the more the desire to distance oneself and to reinforce the armour of the intact self. This, however, cannot be dismissed as a false construction, or something which is necessarily fixed, but as a partial but necessary response, a part of the complex, oscillating, daily push-pull of inside and outside, self and other, private and public, of which the case of a haunting is perhaps an extreme and singular context. It is to acknowledge without judgement that people believe they can successfully enforce boundaries and act to do so in different ways. Many participants needed to find ways of clearing a ‘space’ between themselves and the assumed anomalies – geographical as well as emotional or psychological – although they rarely need to evict them altogether. Their response reinforces an argument for a more nuanced exploration of the self-other relationship within the home, as neither just collapsing self into other or keeping alterity at bay – but often both in different degrees or at different times. It is to follow Varley in acknowledging ‘ambiguities’ in the ‘meaning of home’, not becoming ‘trapped in the binary of exclusionary or idealised space’ (Varley, 2008: 58).

In Part B, I distinguished between strategies of distance and also those of communication or connection. I found that whichever are employed will depend on individual context – in particular, the form of the uncanny event. The use of one set of strategies does not preclude the use of other different ones. Some participants play up the unthreatening nature of their co-habitees, implying a benign influence, describing feelings of curiosity, sympathy, even empathy. Some also desire to engage with their ghosts on some level, particularly where ghosts are interpreted as dead family members. Different strategies and approaches are used depending on the extent of the ‘threat’ – how far the ‘other’ is deemed to impinge upon the ‘self’. Some strategies of communication seem to be about knowing and facing down the ‘other’, and connections are often only desired once other strategies of distance are in place – in other words,

when participants feel secure in their own sense of self-home space to be able to reach out. Connections are usually only encouraged within bounds, geographical, temporal or otherwise, and only if these other strategies which seek to bolster the subject's sense of 'home' are in place. A particular complexity to the task of successful co-habitation is the fact that the 'other' is *already* existing or acting within the spaces of home: some boundaries are not so easy to enforce. Close analysis of interview transcripts reveals subtle strategies such as a tendency to downplay events which don't fit the overall (often more positive) narrative; the more difficult responses tend to be subsumed or sidelined within the wider interpretation.

Granting the ghost a level of 'familiarity' is a way, as described, of closing the gap between 'self' and 'other' in safe ways – by assuming for the entity a gendered person – whilst reinforcing the gap in other ways. The gendered ghosts become reflections of deeply conventional cultural assumptions which categorise in bluntly stereotypical ways masculine and feminine traits, tendencies and personality types. The preferred gender for the ghost is female, which in most cases implies for participants something benign and non-threatening, tending to respect privacy, be more domesticated, be vulnerable or protective. Female ghosts are seen in a positive light in eight case studies; male ghosts are seen in a negative light in five. In an interesting twist on the immaterial, the female ghost is perceived to be less *physically* threatening, suggesting the extent of people's conventional response to gender. Perhaps this also illustrates the limit of the culturally-influenced imagination; alternatively, it is often used as part of strategies of domestication and containment. The ghost must stay within the confines of convention, within the bounds of the stereotype. What is conventional is easily known, understood, contained, categorisable. Limiting individuality also might limit agency to act differently. The ability to describe ghosts as part of conventional categories in part compensates for the impossibility of categorising ghosts at a fundamental level. People's own 'conventionality' is also reflected in their interpretations of their ghosts. CS2 proves an important exception as the ghosts here are not required to reflect the participants' own lifestyles, although the gap between self and other is bridged in other ways. But a complex infrastructure of strategies is also often required to mitigate against the undesired effects of 'others' which are *too similar* to the difficult aspects of self. If the home is the mirror of self, sometimes the ghosts too act like mirrors, as participants seek or acknowledge similarities which go beyond the mere fact of a vague 'humanness'. For Ch in CS2, for example, the petulant ghost is met with her own

petulance. For B in CS10, the ghosts are good and bad, just like humans, just like him; he has literally to take the good with the bad.

Strategies cannot, ultimately, be anything but flexible, more akin to negotiation than ultimatum. Experience always, or always threatens to, exceed the narrative. At a banal level, it is not always possible to create the ghost in the gender of one's choice. If your ghost is female, this becomes a useful and positive association. But if the ghost is male, strategies of distance become more urgent – in some cases (such as T in CS6) are not fully possible. Ghosts don't always appreciate being contained or domesticated, defying conventional categories and labels by their very nature. This is the central irony: any attempt to control, contain, resist, or anticipate an uncanny event has to yield to the fact of its uncontrollable, uncontained, and unexpected nature. The policing of boundaries between public and private spaces within the home is, indeed, sometimes threatened by the shape-shifting fluidity and spatial-temporal defiance of the uncanny. And the problem with such a project is that 'fleshing out' the beyond, giving it a 'face and form', also at times reinforces gender tensions, grants the ghosts more agency, and the possibility for such forms to become more unruly and disruptive – to demand a radical ambivalence, break with convention. This is where the ghosts go – in the excess of language and matter. They can't be pinned down or grasped. So whereas 'strategies' shed light on the multiple mechanisms by which people attempt to maintain their sense of self-at-home, it is a project that can never be completed.

It is not just *experience* itself which talks back at any attempt at containment, in the way Murdoch describes what we encounter remaining 'free, ambiguous, endlessly contingent and *there*', despite our attempts to conceptualise it 'into meaning, into language' (Murdoch, 1993: 196). The idea of a 'strategy' in itself sets up an ideal of human agency and volition which cannot always live up to its own promise. 'Strategy' suggests consciously motivated action, whereas some of these mechanisms appear *not* to be fully conscious, promoting Callard's reminder of the unconscious as a 'realm that is not malleable in terms of cultural resignification' (Callard, 2003: 295). This poses extra interpretative challenges for the researcher, and qualitative data has required careful analysis. But at heart the struggle to fully *articulate* descriptions of the uncanny, in terms of attempting to 'place' experience, appears to reflect the process of reinforcing subjectivity in order to become a victim of its own uncertainty and unfathomable aspects – a struggle to maintain its own 'degree of coherence' (in Varley, 2008: 55), a

‘degree of centring and consistency within the relations that shape it’ (Conradson, 2005: 105-106), and where ‘home’ is central in carrying a ‘core positive meaning as the material anchor for a sense of agency and a shifting and fluid identity’ (Young, 1997: 159). The process of creating a self-at-home – and a self at home with itself – is never automatically conferred in the haunted home. The ability to secure subjectivity is a fragile, unstable project. Nonetheless, again, most people I interviewed continue in such circumstances to speak of ‘home’, which becomes, at least for short intense periods, a dynamic process rather than somewhere to always rest, inert. An additional complexity is the fact that many participants also have to co-habit with friends or family. Interpretations of uncanny events can reinforce, reflect, or change existing social relationships within and beyond the home. Intrinsic to this project is a further set of contested relationships between belief, evidence and experience, which is where I’ll turn next.

CHAPTER FIVE: KNOWLEDGE, BELIEF AND EVIDENCE

The previous chapter explored ways in which participants managed issues arising from co-habiting with ghosts, using a number of interpretative tools and strategies.

Underlying and informing such a project is a wider set of often intersecting beliefs and ideas. This chapter explores the relationships between knowledge, belief and evidence. As suggested in Chapter Four, there is a lot at stake in how people choose to respond to events. These are caught up at the interface between their sense of self and their understanding of the world, including the questions: where is the boundary between the known and unknown? If what is 'knowable' is that which is 'real', can people tolerate the possibility of aspects of life which appear 'unreal', or real on different, uncertain, terms? This epistemological question is also an existential one, intrinsic as it is to people's ongoing attempt to feel 'at home' in their homes.

Part A starts with an exploration of different forms of 'knowing', including attitudes to uncertainty. The process of deciding what is or can be known sometimes produces tension within individuals, but the social context is also important, with different beliefs expressed by people within the same household, often along gender lines. Part B describes different systems of belief informing participants' interpretations, and then explores the role of experiential 'evidence' in reinforcing or challenging these beliefs.

PART A: KNOWLEDGE, BELIEF AND UNCERTAINTY

The section starts with a discussion of different ways in which 'knowledge' is perceived or experienced. This moves to the central investigation: how people negotiate different forms of 'knowledge' in relation to the beliefs they hold and the events they experience. The last section moves from this broad discussion of 'knowledge' to its near opposite – uncertainty.

Different Types of 'Knowledge'

A thread running through the research is people's perplexity as to the *meaning* of uncanny events. 'Meaning' here is 'cause' or 'reason', such as an emotion or idea needing to be communicated. Some people work towards a broader meaning of an event in relation to systems of belief. Mostly, they assume that an event's meaning will never be fully known and is open to different interpretations. For hard-line rationalists, the fact that meaning is obscure, however, leads directly to the conclusion that an event is *meaningless*.

Just knowing

As discussed in Chapter Three, 'knowledge' includes an intuitive or instinctive sensation of 'just knowing' – that a house will be up for sale, that a ghost has a particular characteristic, that the atmosphere is accepting. At times, 'just knowing' is a status given to those who *cannot know any other way*: it is tacitly assumed to be a lesser form of knowledge than 'rational' knowledge. In CS1, for example, the couple's twenty-year old adopted son, JP, with Down's syndrome, is described as someone who cannot properly analyse and who reacts instinctively. He is embroiled in anomalous events in ways which cannot be explained:

RM: [After she sees the ghost of a young man, the word 'Tom' starts to appear on the walls] I said to JP: 'What's the name of the boy?' And he said, apropos of nothing [clicks fingers] 'Tom'. Just like that. He didn't have to think. And he hadn't been told that we'd seen a name, 'Tom', appearing, and he just knew. 'How do you know?' He didn't know how he knew

This non-analytical 'knowing' also relates to other forms of knowledge such as body memory, or to a phenomenological micro-knowledge of a home's physical details. As described, practical and esoteric, physical and metaphysical experience and knowledge of the home intermingle:

B: I'm aware of every – nook and cranny, every lock, and everything about the house I think. Every – almost inch by inch. Every tile, every lock, every – the makings of the

lock, the interior of the locks – the alarm system, where things are, where every – almost – the floorboards. Where I'm going to find nails in floorboards. Almost. It's just like I have a memory of the house. I know cellars, I know everything in the attic. I can describe the small detail of everything (CS10)

Sometimes participants express self-doubt, in terms of wondering if they themselves are a cause of events. There is a sense of submergence, of knowledge just out of reach, more akin to a lack of *self*-knowledge:

RM: I could probably produce stuff that wouldn't be very nice. And I don't know how. And I don't know how I know that... But I rather think that I could, if I wanted to – connect. I suspect I'm not that distant from it. I'm not doing it consciously... I'm not coming down in the night and sleep walking. As far as I'm aware (CS1)

Here, a participant suggests that *she* might create uncanny phenomena. Her knowing is of the vaguest and most uncertain kind – she doesn't know how she knows – but the hint is that her intuition is trying to tell her something and therefore she takes it seriously. However, in this case the social context seems important. This participant is, as will be discussed, suspected of being an instigator of events by another researcher and, indeed, her own husband. Her insecurity may well arise from this situation; she mentions theories which suggest the power of *living* people to produce anomalous phenomena. But this seems to be motivated by a desire to absolve herself from responsibility if she is indeed at the centre of events, to stress that whatever she does is unwitting and unconscious.

In contrast, some people use the feeling of 'just knowing' as a way of reinforcing their *reliability* as a witness of uncanny events:

M: But this was something I definitely knew. That somebody walked through the dining room, passed the window, and back (CS4)

Another form of 'knowledge' is 'meaning-making' inflected through personal connections or memories: events might come to be charged through such an interpretation. Certainly, they are generally perceived by most people as emerging from the space itself, separate from *their* presence. But there is sometimes an underlying search for individual significance. This can include, as described, sharing memories of events with others, the story-telling conferring meanings through the act of activating and reinforcing social bonds over time. But 'meaning' can be more personal. The first response I received from an advert was a woman who later changed her mind about being interviewed. 'Meaning' is not just a rational 'making sense' but is personalised into something 'meaningful':

I apologise for not contacting you sooner, but I've thought long and hard and decided not to continue further with this as I really don't want to share my 'experience' as it was only meant for me. Thank you for your time and good luck

A personal connection reinforces an event as something with credibility and depth. In this example, the event echoes and anticipates 'real-life' events, as if it has 'knowledge' of its own:

RM: We got the word 'affil', apple, and 'cariad' on the wall in April. And just after, we get passed my legacy from my late dad's estate. And, um, 'affil' is apple. 'Cariad' is love. And when I was a girl in Guernsey, sometimes tomatoes were called 'love apples'. And dad made his money, his mint, by growing Guernsey tomatoes (CS1)

Contested Beliefs

For the most part there is an accepted definition that robust 'knowledge' is based on evidence good enough to provide proof. There is a *belief* in such an understanding, an assumption that there is only one legitimate form of knowing (which is also the process of acquiring knowledge): the mainstream logic of rational materialism. For some, however, there is the potential for widening the gap; rational materialism becomes one

system of knowledge amongst others. Even so, those who question rational materialism are simultaneously steeped in it and culturally formed by it.

Some people, as described, are happy to stick to an extreme position without wavering. This is clearly easier for the sceptic, who has the weight of mainstream culture to back him or her up. For L in CS5, there is no room for doubt or uncertainty. A neurologist by profession, he provides a neat description of a reductionist position, combining psychology and neurology to create a picture of false experience leading to, or informed by, false belief:

L: My own view is that there isn't anything. I'd be quite happy to explain it just from the point of view of how the human brain works. You know, with expectation and anticipation as such – by interpretation or something which is partially imagination and partially just a phenomenon that people don't have an understanding for

C: You say some phenomenon isn't understood?

L: Well, but that happens all the time. I mean our observations aren't as clear-cut. So you may have – the occurrences might be towards the end of the day, when there's only dim light inside or outside... in an old house like this there is always all sorts of noises... the brain makes mistakes all the time. And then you have circumstances where, if you strongly expect to see something – that someone is going to move across the lawn, and – it's late in the day... you actually might think someone is going there. So our mind does tricks... and if there is a cultural setting for them – then you actually might be geared or primed into seeing one eventually, in the right circumstances

In the opposite corner, there are also examples of *belief* in ghosts as the 'taken for granted' position. Caretaker B in CS10 doesn't need to prove or disprove the existence of ghosts. He doesn't question whether they – or his experiences – are real. He incorporates the idea of ghosts into his idea of home and his place within it. At times, people admit to an awareness of a tendency to *assume* a supernatural cause when it isn't necessary warranted. A in CS12 concedes that she often blames her ghost cat, W, for life's little mysteries:

A: [A living cat in the room] He was looking in there [assuming the cat is staring at the ghost cat] – actually, there's a spider there. I take it back. It's gone. Oh, it's here. Sometimes she gets the blame for things nothing to do with her. I'm ashamed to say, I

probably do instantly assume it's her and occasionally it's not... I'm not sure if W becomes the archetypal can carrier for all mischief

Some people contradict themselves, at one point avowing scepticism, at others conceding the possibility of ghosts. The owner of the castle in CS13, for example, is generally scathing about belief in ghosts, laughing at the people who pay her to go on 'ghost tours':

A: I generally see them drifting around. They come back! I recognised one woman and said: 'I've seen you before'

She is happy to talk romantically about her home (in a pamphlet about the history of the castle she writes: 'Nothing that the ebb and flow of Fate has thrown at it has yet diminished its enchantment'), but is keen to separate this from any belief in it being haunted. Later she casually mentions she is open to the possibility of a particular ghost, a monk. At another time, she claims she has seen a photograph of 'ghost rats' taken in the garden:

A: In the mists they saw the form of rats appearing. All of them saw it. And it came out in a photo. Most bizarre. Even I was convinced. Ghost rats!

The oscillation between different positions seems, at times, a response to seeking a middle ground, to negotiating between the 'legitimate' form of knowing, and other, different kinds of 'knowing'. Here, K in CS2 expresses this contradiction:

K: [The ghosts] are not [religiously] orthodox. Even though I know I don't know – I'm absolutely sure

In CS1, RM is open about her ambiguity, the multiplicity of possible explanations. But she is more open when being interviewed on her own than when responding to questions as part of a couple. Husband D is a recently retired head teacher. RM, as a 'house wife', seems to feel her inferiority keenly: 'My husband is very analytical. He's a very intelligent person, as you can tell. I'm not'. Her belief in her lack of standard 'knowledge' leads her to doubt herself. But it is also an emancipating position, allowing her leeway to sit with, to accept, *not* knowing. She doesn't *expect* ordinarily to know very much about the world anyway:

RM: I can... distance myself from it. D can't possibly, because he has to know. And he doesn't want to believe in spirits of the dead. As I don't understand physics, I can [laughs] – I can distance myself from it!

Her lack of training in reductionist, analytical forms of knowledge-gathering allows her to hold potentially different beliefs at the same time, following a kind of associational, unstructured mental process:

RM: I mean, I've got no evidence. D wants evidence – you can't go above, beyond the laws of physics... D tries to be logical. I don't bother with logic. Logic never gets in the way [laughs] where I'm concerned! And that irritates him completely, because – I can exist on a few places. My brain is [she moves her hands up and down at the sides of her head]... I flit from one thing to another. I can have about twenty thought processes running around in my head at the same time. And that drives him – potty... I don't know... I don't sort of have to pin it down. D has to be totally analytical and say, 'It must work – there must be a mechanism'. But I don't know if there's one mechanism. I don't know. It doesn't worry me!... My mind works so differently to D's... I can hold a few different positions in my head at one time, whereas he... can't, unless it makes sense in the realms of physics or whatever. Whereas I can be quite happy and believe – well, within certain parameters, I mean I'm not stupid

In contrast, husband D presents a more heroic stance as the truth-seeker:

D: [A tombstone, dug up by previous owners during landscaping, is usually propped up against an outside wall. It keeps going missing, and this time is found buried under a bush] I'm just collecting facts. The fact is – that the blackcurrant bush was damaged. In a way which was consistent with somebody having to manoeuvre a heavy stone and bury it

RM: [Annoyed] But we don't know that that caused it to be damaged

D: I'm not even saying we did... I'm simply saying that there is a fact to bear in mind

RM: I don't remember it was that damaged

D: I do

RM: Yeah, well you would

D: Of course I would. Because I look for things like that. The natural associations. Just as I noticed the way in which the tombstone had been pivoted

[Pause]

RM: Well, at least I wasn't there

D: No

It becomes clear just how disputed facts are: RM questions whether, and then how much, the bush was damaged. She questions his motive – 'yeah, well you would' – as being fuelled by scepticism. He retorts that the right approach to seek the truth is to watch for 'natural associations'. It is not just that he is searching for 'facts': he is doing so within a particular, contested, social context. RM shifts a gear, defensive; she wasn't around, at least it couldn't have been done by her.

Later, D does accept the existence of different theories, but only negotiates plurality in a search for the *one* truth that explains everything:

D: In all honesty, in science or in management, I never reject the data. Or try not to. Because it's convenient. Or because it means that – that means you can hold your hypothesis or your belief and you forget about this. I tend to keep all the balls in play. And, RM's great at telling – when I say, telling stories, I mean in the sense of giving narrative! Er, interesting narrative!... Otherwise we aren't going to come out in the end, in this case, with an interesting truth, with a theory which actually covers the whole thing fully

The category 'supernatural' is rejected because it doesn't explain anything, in the terms of his paradigm:

D: Intellectual dishonesty is the other position. The one that says, 'Um, yeah, I'll pretend that doesn't – happen'

C: I'm assuming you sit uneasy with theories of the supernatural –

D: They're not an explanation! What do you mean, 'That's supernatural'? You mean –

C: You don't know what else it can be?

D: So you just give it a label, 'the supernatural', and somehow think you've explained something. But you haven't, have you?

Supernatural theories, for D, constitute sloppy science, a failure of intellectual stamina. For D, a 'scientific' explanation is required for proof because nothing else is possible.

Such an explanation might become known in the *future* – a messianic vision based on the confidence of the intellectual process to yield answers, an articulation of the idea of linear progress. Part of D's truth-seeking also means accepting 'those inconvenient things' which, in the history of science, have actually 'shown... the truth'. His 'inconvenience' is having to suspect that his wife – often at home when events occur – might be involved as a cause of uncanny events:

D: It's not a wind up. Well, it's a possibility, isn't it? It's a possibility I can't rule out. There are various happenings which tend to move in that direction, which suggest that's the case. Like any good scientist, I'm pointing them out. There are also examples which suggest that RM couldn't possibly be the person responsible [because she wasn't there at the time]. I'm pointing them up. As you might have noticed

Elsewhere, a dogged desire to be 'rational' can be a defence against the idea of the paranormal. In CS2, K is very open about her fear of ghosts. This is the main motive, she says, behind a desire for a rational explanation; she wants one which denies supernatural 'reality'. But there is a contradiction, because, within her social context, she also accepts and respects her flatmates' uncanny experiences, and is sometimes persuaded of her own:

K: Obviously I believe [in ghosts] enough to think I'd rather they didn't appear to me... It's like I would absolutely do my best... to block any interpretation of the supernatural... The thing is how to interpret things. I just feel like, if there was a breeze passing over my face, I would never think that it was that. And I wouldn't want to. So I think I really resist the interpretations that... I would always think it was psychological. And I would never, ever, ever want to interpret, you know, I think that whole side of myself I haven't wanted to explore and I've always been very frightened of... [On a previous experience] I interpreted [banging doors] in a rational way. But it wasn't rational, because I thought, 'Oh that must be the wind', and I didn't give it another thought. And it was only when Ch came and started to say, 'This is a very active house', and I [heard] a lot of doors were banging. I thought, 'God, she's right. I've really noticed that'. And when I walk in a room and a door bangs behind me, it's very, very... noticeable. And I thought, 'Yes, that is strange', because it wasn't windy... [Of the current home] I have to say in this house there are a lot of opening doors and banging doors, in my room actually... But I still can't just, you know, I just to myself, I interpret

that as the breeze. God knows where that breeze is supposed to be coming from, but anyway

She is conscious of an irony in her attempt to maintain a *rational* stance whilst knowing this might be an *irrational* move in the light of the events she and her friends experience. In contrast, flatmate Ch seems content to accept she is ‘*not rational*’. She doesn’t need to analyse uncanny events, for this reason: they cannot be explained rationally. This leads again to ‘just knowing’ as a statement of confidence; her ‘sense’ is a form of ‘making sense’ that doesn’t rely on rationality:

Ch: A lot of this I can’t explain. I just sense it. And I’m not rational. I wouldn’t be like K, trying to get a rational answer to it. I just accept it for what it is. I don’t analyse it

She also becomes a key depository of information, suggesting the interpretation of the uncanny to K, who in turn confers authority on her for possessing *knowledge* she lacks. In a similar way, the local psychic medium is also influential as an ‘expert’ in CS9, trusted to know what the family ordinarily could not. The medium becomes a conduit between the strange and familiar, translating the unknown into the knowable, explaining cause for effect.

In CS3, S also expresses interest in popular cultural ideas about the supernatural, attending the shows of well-known mediums. But she is able to step back and question their veracity, complaining that they are often ‘vague’ in what they say, and testing them by withholding information in order not to offer them clues:

S: I just tend to let them feed it all to me – I decide it for myself... I don’t tend to ask any questions

At one point, the medium doesn’t give her specific enough information about a suicide, and S doesn’t risk upsetting her neighbour, the widow, for no reason. As in examples where participants protect friends or children from information which might disturb them, the social context of knowledge is important here: it’s not just about different types of ‘knowing’, but what to do with the information one knows: knowing when to communicate information, and when to keep quiet. S questions what accounts for

legitimate knowledge, despite her belief in the supernatural and embrace of popular culture:

S: My next-door neighbour but one committed suicide... And [the medium] said, 'I've got a man here who's committed suicide', and everyone looked around at me... I kept quiet. [The wife] came round the other night... and I thought, 'I can't tell you. Because you'll probably think that's all loony'. I mean, she [the medium] didn't give me any information... If she'd said what his name was or gave me something that maybe I could use as a key word then that would have been different... And I thought – 'Mmmm'. I've seen her before and she's very fast but very vague. So it could have applied to anybody

The social context of knowledge transference is important and might explain how some people – such as K in CS2 – can hold seemingly contradictory beliefs. S won't allow tarot cards into her otherwise eclectic belief system, but it is unclear if this isn't more to do with her relationship with a colleague – a 'white witch' who offers her a reading – or some pre-held belief:

S: And I was like [dismissively], 'No, I don't think I'll go that far, thank you!'

In CS4, R expresses an internal conflict between competing systems of belief. In her public sense of self, R, an academic, is a rational materialist. She dismisses believers in the supernatural as 'flaky' (a word she repeats), suggesting something silly and ungrounded against the solid bedrock of Western civilised thought. At the same time, she separates general statements of belief from the particular story of *her* household ghost ('Annie'), detailed over the course of a number of emails and conversations. I was surprised that, without my pushing her, she did not reflect on the irony of her position, the impasse between general belief and specific experience. This tension came to the fore right at the start of our first meeting:

R: I don't believe in ghosts. Let me say that very clearly

C: Really?

R: Yep

C: After all that? All your emails?

R: I don't. I can't. [Very firmly, arms crossed] I don't believe in ghosts. I definitely do not believe in ghosts. [Quickly] But I've got a ghost

She states the dilemma dramatically. Analytical and articulate, R wishes to stress her rationalist stance at the outset, to clarify her position, before we got on with the task at hand: to talk about the ghost. How does she manage this? She doesn't. The rational stance again becomes an *irrational* one. She expresses her contradiction with a flourish:

R: I definitely do not believe in ghosts. [Quickly] But I've got a ghost

C: Ok. How do you square that one?

R: How do I square it? By being divinely, inconsistently irrational

It's as if her dogmatism wears her down as swiftly as she states it – she swings teasingly to the opposite pole. Again, the wider context seems important. The ghost might play a role in deepening her personal connection to her home, but she plays down any *need* to believe, focusing on a lack of emotional investment, an attitude of nonchalance:

C: Would you prefer not to [believe]?

R: Well, no. I couldn't care le – I'm very indifferent. I don't care. I don't have an emotional kind of thing about it. I think that's flaky, in fact. I think I'm just quite – detached about it... I've never believed in ghosts. That's obvious. I'm quite old. I've been on the planet half a century, and ghosts haven't come into my, um –

C: But they have now?

R: Yeah. But I can't be bothered to believe in them. Put it that way

Later she elaborates, more forcefully:

R: It's just that I can't be bothered to believe in ghosts. In a way, I just think that people add that to themselves and it's a bit flaky... I just think, 'Come on!' There might be a rational reason for it all in the end. There might be a bit of subsidence which makes the pictures go wonky. It could be my central heating which is drying out the house... You know... there could be a rational reason. Well, there's so much bollocks in the world, isn't there? There's so much flakiness. You know. [Pause] I really don't know. [Pause] Just don't know. I just don't know

Her 'not being bothered' stance seems motivated in part by a need to distance herself from the 'flaky' people who are gullible in believing things which can't be substantiated. She toys with a few rational (physical) reasons why the pictures on the

walls might move – subsidence, central heating. But she is left with the only other possible position: to admit she just doesn't, cannot *know*.

Her next argument to explain a lack of concern about the ghost dwells on her emotional *response* to it, and, in doing so, rather reinforces her contradictory position:

R: And also my ghost's a good ghost. She's very – opposite of malevolent. You know. She's a dear little ghost, I think

R positions herself and her experience in relation to certain cultural assumptions, which replicate traditional ideas about ghosts, as described in the introduction, such as that ghosts are malevolent. Despite distancing herself, she spends much time wanting to prove the existence of ghosts, as will be explored; and at times she stumbles into vague but acknowledging statements like this one:

R: I kind of believe that there are things that do happen like that, yeah

In CS5, M explores a tension between the more rational and more imaginative aspects of herself: the uncanny events force these differences into open relation. M, a historian by training, has learned to sift materials for facts, but the uncertainty of what she witnesses makes her question the line between fact and fiction. Whereas R in CS4 flamboyantly accepts the contradiction of her position, M in CS5's response is to reflect upon what is 'real':

C: How do you feel about having a ghost?

M: I am curious about it. We think that if you can't prove something, it doesn't exist. Like historians can't say – we can't say anything that is only opinion – we have to prove everything. And everything must be real. You are not allowed to assume anything. And then this is – my education is so much against these things, that I'm so curious if it's – [laughs]. On the other hand, I think it can't be possible. [Disparaging, critical voice] That's just my imagination, it's only that I like this house to be so special, that I make it all up. But I know I'm not doing that

She can't prove the ghost exists, but she can allow herself to be fascinated by the possibility that what she has learned, and how knowledge is gained or what constitutes

the 'real', is too narrow to embrace all of life. She can't bring herself to finish her sentence: 'My education is so much against these things, that I'm so curious if it's – ': she is going to say, 'actually true', but changes direction. Self-doubt creeps in: she must be imagining what she has experienced to bolster her relationship with her home. But another voice steps in to silence the critical one, a part of herself that trusts and 'knows' that her experiences are valid – 'I make it all up. But I know I'm not doing that'.

We explore her feelings further, and she elaborates:

C: Are you influenced by your [sceptical] husband? Does this voice in your head – that says it can't be possible – come from him?

M: I think it's because of all the training, of thinking, you know. I think, as I said, all academic people have been trained to think in a certain way. That if you can't prove it, it doesn't exist. And I can't prove it

This dilemma, explored later, is acknowledged and resolved by an embrace of uncertainty. But M's trusting in her experiences of the uncanny is also subject to the specific context of these events; at times she oscillates between belief and non-belief depending on *where* the event occurs. In general she is adamant that she does experience uncanny phenomena but at one point she is more ambiguous:

M: I like to leave the window open. And two mornings I woke up and noticed that the window was closed. And it was rather strange because – this [she moves vertical and horizontal metal window fasteners] the wind can't do. But it was closed like that [the window is fastened shut]. Maybe it was the wind [opens the window, attaches horizontal fastener to a notch securing it open]. But from this position in the morning [she closes the window again]

C: They have to be lifted up and put back down again

M: To this! [Laughs] it could be done by the wind but – it happened twice

What I expected her to say at the end of such a detailed investigation was: 'It could not have been done by the wind'. But she says the opposite, leaving the sentence prematurely before moving back to a neutral statement of fact. This event took place in her bedroom when her husband was away. A feeling of vulnerability might have stopped her from labelling the experience as definitively strange.

For M's husband, L, the belief that the house is haunted is an example of 'suggestion': here, the *idea* of ghosts is transferred from one group of people (the villagers) to the household incomers. L himself is *not* subject to suggestion – the only rational individual in a household of women, literally, 'the odd man out', and heroically happy to be so:

L: It has amused me when people have come here and have actually found this topic not only fascinating but also something that they somehow associated their own experiences with [chuckles]... The peer pressure is that – you know, everybody else in the house has seen all these ghosts or whatever. 'Why don't you?' [Laughs] But I'm happy to be the odd man out, because I truly haven't – had any experiences of any kind which I could not very easily explain by – in a purely, utterly, completely, totally natural way

Despite the diversity of case studies, there is a distinct 'gender divide' between the two halves of the heterosexual couples. This is the pattern in CS1, CS3, CS5, CS9 and CS11. Tensions between husbands and wives concern levels of openness to belief and levels of tolerance towards different forms of knowledge. The women are more open to believing in ghosts, the men are far more sceptical. L's argument, above, insinuates a long-standing belief that suggestibility is a trait of susceptible, gullible, and irrational people who are easily influenced emotionally and intellectually: children, women, simple folk, old wives (Blackman and Walkerdine, 2001). Thus, ideas about what counts as the rational or irrational are created within a particular social, cultural and political context. There are some variations: two case studies were instigated by male believers (CS7 and CS10), whilst some women wanted at least to be *seen* as sceptical (CS4 and CS13). But for a perhaps surprising number of case studies, cultural beliefs and roles are very conventional and conservative, reinforcing stereotypical gender differences which mirror those reflected onto the ghosts themselves, as described in Chapter Four.

In CS1, for example, RM describes having 'psychic flashes' since her menopause: premonitions of forthcoming events, intuitive knowledge of things she shouldn't rationally know. This 'just knowing' becomes knowing *too much* for sceptical husband D; he questions her when she knew where to look for the tombstone after it disappeared.

For him, this becomes a suspicious activity, in an atmosphere where a hoax is deemed a possibility. RM responds that her new-found psychic abilities are related to her life stage as a *woman*, which reinforces the gender divide further. Again she sounds defensive:

RM: Ever since the menopause I have these – it's no good to me – I just, I get these psychic flashes as I call them. And they're no good to me. And they're disconcerting, but from time to time, I just know – something ... It doesn't do me any good. I don't do anything with it because I don't want to

She tries to rationalise her experience, distancing herself from this 'psychic' part of herself by emphasising its irrationality, pointing out the lack of practical utility, of personal gain, the fact that the 'flashes' happen without *good reason*.

H in CS11 also spends much time defending her interpretation of experiences whilst being gently goaded by her husband:

H: This is where the lady comes up with the rustling skirt

A: [Firmly] Never in this world! The wind came up the – the tunnel

H: It didn't! There was nothing – to – rustle. Nothing at all. These curtains [velvet curtains separating the living room from the staircase] didn't exist. It was just a bare staircase. And she comes a-rustling. You could hear. [Pause] I know what silk rustles sound like

A: [Now standing away from her, looking out the window on the opposite side. He speaks quietly, firmly] Too much taffeta. Too much television. [He turns back from the window and gives me/the camera a subtle cheeky grin]

H: [Ignoring him] And – and it was definitely a long, rustling silk skirt that – came up the stairs. Absolutely came upstairs here

Here there is a performance of roles – he acknowledges as much with his grin to the camera. He accuses her of embellishment – too much television-watching (impressionably soaking up popular ideas about ghosts), too much sewing (affecting her judgement, making her 'hear' fabric).

H also describes how the neighbour who saw a ghost monk in her kitchen kept the experience from her husband and sons:

H: She said: 'I can't tell the men folk, because they'd just laugh at me'

Her friend anticipated the reaction of her husband and sons and decided to keep quiet. But then one of her son's friends has the same experience:

H: And then, maybe a couple of months later, one of her twenty-or-so year old children's – son's friends came to see her and said: 'You know, there's something else here besides you lot'. So she said: 'Tell me'. And this boy described exactly the same thing, exactly the same doorway. He'd been having coffee in the kitchen, around the table, and the lad said: 'I couldn't tell the boys either because they'd laugh at me. But I thought I could tell you'

The two women spoke of their experiences because they could trust each other to take them seriously. For the same reason, the son's friend confided in another female, not the men. These women are (are *perceived* as more likely to be) more open to tolerating the possibility of processes which cannot be explained by the mainstream rationalist paradigm. But, under pressure from sceptical spouses, they also display self-doubt, even when acknowledging and defending differences of opinion. A repeated way in which this manifests is in passing comments which question their mental health. Women are self-conscious, internalising the doubts of their sceptical male partners (RM: 'I could be totally barking' (CS1)). In CS8, D's husband (since divorced) called her 'stupid' for believing that she could hear a baby crying in the house that wasn't their own baby:

D: And he used to laugh at this and say, 'Don't be so stupid!'... I get ridiculed all the time. But I'm a level-headed person. I don't make things up

In CS12, A is reassured by other witnesses that she is not 'mad':

A: I thought I was going mad. It was only when other people started seeing her too... You obviously don't tell everyone you have a spirit cat. So obviously I hadn't. You are likely to be sectioned

Even S in CS3, who is generally self-confident, points out:

S: I just think each to their own really. If he [her fiancé] doesn't want to believe, that's up to him... I think he thinks I'm a loony sometimes

People also looked to me, as an 'expert' researcher, to reassure them that they were not mad; being rational is also about being sane or 'normal'. It is usually the women who want to know they are, at least, not alone in having uncanny experiences. The slant of one question by a male sceptic was rather loaded, and led me to emphasise how interviewees appeared normal to *me*. Note how he distances himself – and especially his own *wife*, a believer – from being a 'crank'; and how he associates cranks with living in 'dumps':

A: Would you say generally the people you are meeting are fairly normal, or are they cranks living in dumps? I've got to say I'm suspicious. I mean, I know this isn't your brief, but what do you think personally? (CS11)

Embracing Uncertainty

A desire for knowledge is a rejection of uncertainty, but underlying all uncanny events is an inability to *fully* know – this is the key 'fact' about the uncanny to be faced or tolerated. Not knowing becomes an active process, a reality of its own, not just a marker of the limit or boundary of knowledge:

D: It was frustrating because I never knew what it was. And probably I'll never know what it was...There's no explanation at all – for it... Just things you can't explain. You couldn't begin to. I don't know. I just don't know (CS8)

...

RM: But I – I don't know. I mean, to be perfectly honest, I really don't know (CS1)

...

M: The trouble is that you're never quite sure (CS5)

Even when an uncanny event is shared, there is still sometimes uncertainty about whether it was *really* an uncanny event – about distinguishing sounds within the already

noisy terrain of the domestic interior, as described in Chapter Three. Here, for example, a mother and daughter debate a ubiquitous sound:

G: [Talking about hearing footsteps upstairs] But there is also this slight question of interpretation, because sometimes you just – I don't know, the heating, the –

M: Yes. In these old houses, there are so many noises –

G: So you say, 'This could be somebody – walking. But it's not like it's absolutely somebody

C: So it's not so distinctive that you can say, 'definitely footsteps'?

G: I think the first times I was quite sure it was footsteps. But maybe I was so prepared to interpret (CS5)

Later, the doubt about the 'reality' of uncanny experience is more a phenomenological one related to the ability of the witness to observe in a fully objective and rational way:

M: And then we started talking about these things that have happened in the house – or things we think have happened... I think I – I felt somebody moving around. But then I don't know if I was sleeping and dreaming or if it was false

People react to uncertainty differently. But uncertainty itself has its uses; it is not necessarily a difficult experience or an uneasy staging post on the way to certainty. Not everyone has a desire to know who the ghost is, or that an event definitely has an uncanny cause. This can be a co-habitation strategy, as described in Chapter Four. People also take positions around 'knowing' for different reasons. Here, P in CS2 is so *accepting* of the ghosts, of their right to exist in her home, that she exhibits no urgent need to know:

P: I'm hardly curious about them, really. I've hardly wanted to know any more – when I say I know, the thing is, maybe I don't know know, but I'm not at all surprised

Similarly, for M in CS5, there is a lack of a *need* to know because an event doesn't make enough of an emotional impact to warrant it:

M: It hasn't made such a strong impression that I would like to find out more about it

The couple in CS1 work through different responses to uncertainty. For RM, she accepts the events as radically uncertain in their very nature. She allows events to just *be*, on their own terms. Her narrative is full of contradictions, of bracketed off explanatory anecdotes leading nowhere, or sudden twists; stories are suspended and allowed to hang in the air. As described, RM doesn't know if there is one mechanism to explain the uncanny event, but she can live with this uncertainty. But for husband D, the drive is for a coherent, linear narrative; uncertainty yields to a fantasy of the possibility of truth. He hasn't *yet* found a cause for the events, but that doesn't mean he never will. Knowledge is deferred, and becomes a kind of metaphorical ghostly presence guiding him, reinforcing his resolve to stick to a system of belief. At the same time he *revels* in uncertainty, in terms of enjoying the intellectual riddle, the interesting process of gathering information whilst confident in the 'knowledge' that all will be revealed:

D: If you could actually answer all the big questions of life for certain, now, it would take away a lot of the interest, wouldn't it?... I find it almost eternally interesting. To be faced with a problem where, at the moment, all you can do is to try to collect the information together. And speculate about possible reasons. That's just interesting

C: And the fact that there is no – that this is a constant process of gathering –

D: Yes

C: Material that never yields an answer

D: But you don't know that it can never yield an answer... I'd be very surprised if sometime in the future we don't discover a mechanism

In the meantime, uncertainty is also a fact of life to be dealt with – like he did as a headmaster:

C: So, you're happy not to know?

D: No, I'm not happy not to know! I'd love to know. [Raising voice] But I sit and live with uncertainty on all kinds of fronts, all the time. I used to. It was called management! You never knew what was going to happen from moment to moment! Throughout the day. You had to deal with whatever occurred. There's that sort of uncertainty. I don't know if I'm going to live tomorrow, do I? You work on several bases, don't you? One is: 'I'm competent to deal with nearly everything that hits me. If I'm not, I know someone who is'. And if it gets beyond that – well, life's full of experiences. That's what

it's for! Let's wait and see what happens... Yes, it's quite true that I sit with [uncertainty] and enjoy it. But what are the alternatives?

For many people, there is also a fear of *too much* knowledge. Their emotional need is *not* to know:

K: I feel like I don't know everything that's going on around here and I'm happier in my ignorance (CS2)

As described, K favours a 'rational' explanation for the same reason – to avoid confronting her fear of ghosts. The desire to remain ignorant has the same motive; it is a form of avoidance. D in CS8 also doesn't want to explore why her feelings change in different places, and is quite adamant about this:

D: I don't like the back. Quite happy with this part and the front garden. I don't like the atmosphere in the back garden. I don't know why. And I don't want to know why

For M in CS7 there is a similar preference not to know, but here the motive is clear. Like D in CS1, uncertainty, for all the frustration, can be more interesting than having everything bolted down in 'reality'. For him, it is an escape from mundane life. He 'dwells' in uncertainty as much as he dwells in his haunted home – a mental as much as physical space. But his backdrop is a 'certainty' of belief in the supernatural. So uncertainty here adds an emotional frisson rather than being caught up in any process of searching for knowledge or avoiding doing so:

M: There is an element of uncertainty. But I enjoy dwelling in that uncertainty. I've been a teacher a long time, which is pretty sort of mundane

But at another point in the conversation, M expresses a similar sentiment to D in CS8 – a preference *not* to investigate an event because this might impact on his emotional state at the time:

C: [About hearing footsteps in the back garden] And your bedroom was at the back of the house at this stage?

M: Yes

C: Did you look out of the window?

M: I did go to the back, but then I thought it was better not to look out [laughs]

C: Why not?

[Pause]

C: Because – you didn't want to experience anything else?

M: I suppose so... Ignorance is bliss, isn't it?

Here is a man who loves to collect theories, has read many books on the paranormal. But an actual experience creates a different response: a desire not to look. Here 'ignorance' is experiential; to be ignorant of *experience*, as if experience somehow grants its own knowledge, in the sense that people talk about 'knowing' what they experience, trusting their senses. Keeping the experience vague allows M to avoid too much of this experiential knowledge in favour of the more abstracted, distanced, knowledge that comes out of books.

Experiential knowledge creates unease in CS4 too. R describes an odd, contradictory response when she apparently gains further 'evidence' of the existence of her ghost:

C: So despite hearing more evidence for the ghost at the local party, you all became more sceptical, not less. That's odd

R: Yes. We had a rational day the next day. It must have been a reaction. But I'm waiting to hear the next thing

The 'rational day' the following day was not, as elsewhere, about the certainty of *disbelief*; rather, it was about a preference not to know for sure, a reaction against the possibility that such things can be made certain at all.

The youngest daughter of V in CS9 also expresses unease at the idea of certainty – the implication of a particular experience which left no leeway for other explanations:

G: One day, when I was – being ill... and mummy was asleep on the couch, and I could hear footsteps upstairs going from mummy's bedroom to the office. And that scared me because I was the only one awake in the house

At other times, events still might be caused by the ordinary noises of the home or the movement of her parents or older sister. But here she knows she is the only person awake in the house, suggesting a supernatural cause is more likely.

The leeway to imagine the uncanny event as something radically uncertain – that might be real, or unreal – is also played out imaginatively as a relationship between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’. But the line between them is often contested within a particular social – gendered – context, as described above. D in CS1, for example, hints that his wife embellishes. Whereas he is ‘just collecting facts’, she tells ‘stories’ (‘RM’s great at telling stories... in the sense of giving... interesting narrative’). But often those imaginatively interpreting their ghosts are clear about the boundary between fictional narrative and experience. RM describes writing stories about the ghosts, but distinguishes these from ‘facts’ that might fit:

RM: I’ve made a very good story out of it. I’ve written up a story about how the monk got her in the family way! [Laughs]

C: They [the ghosts] are connected?

RM: Not really. That’s a story – it’s a possibility. I could write that up as a work of fiction because I’ve no idea. Because, quite honestly, [the ghost whose name is on the grave stone] Jane Jones is 1778. The monk is supposed to be 1613

The facts don’t add up, so her theory can only become ‘certain’ as fiction, where a broader set of ideas is allowed into the category of ‘possibility’. Sometimes this relationship between fact and fiction is reproduced knowingly to offer leeway for interpreting events otherwise, or to place them in the safe world of the not-real. In CS5, for example, M separates the rational from the imaginative, and favours placing the category of ‘ghost’ in the realm of imagination – perhaps it can do less harm here, it cannot infringe on the ‘reality’ of domestic life. I ask her if the ghost ‘adds’ anything to her life:

M: In a way it’s – my imagination is fascinated by these things you know

C: Is your imagination separate from your –

M: [laughs] I think it is!... You see, if I write an essay on such things and send it to an historical journal – I wouldn’t do it. But if I can tell a story, and use my imagination,

these things I have seen – not seen so much as heard and smelt in the house – I would write a story. I wouldn't mind to write a story

C: Stories are fictional, historical essays are fact?

M: Stories are fictional, yes

C: So there's a separation

M: Yes, I think they are two different things. You know. And even if I – it attracts my imagination, that something is happening in the house. But then, this part of me that is trained to think academically refuses everything like that. But still there is a part of me which says that [lowers voice to a low whisper], 'This is too fascinating to be not true!' [Pause]... I think that if I hadn't had the training to think theoretically, logically [laughs], to prove everything, I think I would be a lot more prepared to believe those things. And maybe make up more, just to make it more fascinating, or something! To use my imagination

At the same time, however, her experiential knowledge counts for more 'reality' than to be dismissed as mere imagination, and at other times she stands by a belief in ghosts:

M: But you see, those things I have seen! They are real to me – yes, they are real. I can smell – I can hear – I can see...I don't think I'm a loony if I can smell that! I'm still quite – ok [points to her head] – in my head. Within certain limits!

She does trust her experience after all; her reality is what she senses. She rejects her husband's assumption that this 'reality' is not 'out there' but is a part of her psychological or neurological responses to the home. But what she senses she cannot 'make sense of', it does not confer the kind of knowledge that she has been trained to value as 'real'. The only response can be to reinforce a split between what is imagination and what is reality – *despite* the fact that what is 'real' by this definition is also imaginary. The realm of the imagination is a space where events can be 'uncertain' by the rules of rational knowledge, and yet still find existence. This seems to work for her. She acknowledges a *desire* to believe – 'this is too fascinating not to be true!' But her rational side still disparages her belief, making it into something motivated by desire and thus less 'real' in itself, because it is not subject to the rigours of rational enquiry. She reasons that if she wasn't so well educated, she might more easily believe and even embellish her experiences to create better stories – to 'use my imagination'. Here, the ghost becomes a character in a fairy tale, belonging to an imaginary (by extension,

childish) fantasy world. And yet, tantalisingly, she clearly *does* believe. She seems to use this expressed ambiguity, this uncertainty, as a tactic, to maintain her privacy, to keep herself grounded. She suggests that the ‘imaginary’ has its own reality and she wants to allow it its own existence. There is a desire to remain in the realm of uncertainty, the space of ambivalence, of the liminal, to ‘hang in the air’ – literally, narratively – between knowing and not-knowing, believing and not-believing.

In Chapter Four, I discussed *not* knowing as a strategy, with its connection to not *seeing* (a point taken up again in Part B of this chapter). Here, M states that not seeing the ghost is preferable because it confers a less-than-real status, making her able to question whether it is, after all, merely an imaginative – a *lesser* – reality:

M: I don't want to come face to face with anything – like that. As long as it's more like a fairy tale it doesn't matter so much

C: So you say fairy tale – is there still a question mark about the Pink Lady's existence?

M: Of course it is. But... I'm not sure what I would think about the situation where I was standing – face to face with the Pink Lady

C: Would that make her more real?

M: It makes it more real. Now I can always – take it so – whatever. There is space enough for all of us

As described, there is a hierarchy of senses at work, and it is embroiled in her idea of what constitutes ‘reality’. To see something or someone is to make it (and here it is an ‘it’) more real, and she doesn’t want to confront reality, she doesn’t want to end the uncertainty, the tantalising ambivalence – a retreat both physical and metaphysical. But an impasse remains. She wants to take away the ‘reality’ of the Pink Lady, yet not to discount her experience. But this potential tension is itself deferred. The narrative is allowed its own ambiguity, its own contradictory momentum.

As these examples show, uncertainty is double-edged. It reminds people of the precariousness of their ‘experience’, of aspects of themselves they can never be fully aware of, of their lack of control over the unknowable future. It prevents the narrative being neatly closed, stalls the search for meaning. Uncertainty has to be worked with, fought against, or accepted as having a reality of its own, something which can fascinate and animate mundane ‘reality’. The latter echoes the rather romantic ways in which

some commentators have picked up on Jane Bennett's (2001) call to 're-enchant' everyday life. And, although this is never the full story, uncertainty can be a good thing for some participants, allowing leeway to interpret phenomena, to allow subtly differing 'grades' of reality they can deal with, and to negotiate between knowledge developed from lived experience and knowledge internalised from wider social and cultural mores. But the former 'experiential' knowledge is already informed by these latter mores in different ways.

PART B: BELIEF, EVIDENCE AND EXPERIENCE

Interpretations of an event focus on its experiential details, the evidence available at the time, and the particular context in which it is witnessed. Inherent within this process is also the act of matching up the details of experience with expectations of the relationships between evidence, proof and knowledge. For some, no evidence is enough to offer 'proof'; for others, the relationship between evidence and proof remains inarticulate, a tantalising, silent possibility. As described in Part A, there are those whose understanding of what may count as 'knowledge' is an uncomplicated trusting to experience – trusting the evidence of the senses, or to their intuition to show them what is 'real' or authentic. For some participants, as shown, there is a broadening of the scope of what can be defined as 'real'. For most, the relationship between knowledge, evidence and proof is complex, but the tendency is to use 'rational' means to test out the irrational. This part of the chapter scrutinises, in turn, people's wider beliefs and different forms of evidence.

Different Beliefs, Different Responses

A spectrum of beliefs – religious, folkloric, cultural – interconnect and influence participants in their interpretations. These reflect the way experience is 'mediated' in multiple ways. For example, Hodgkin and Radstone (2003b) describe the central role that memories play in 'giving meaning' to our experience; Ahmed (2004) also stresses how the way we recognise something is bound up with what we already know. There is often interplay between experiences and beliefs *about* experiences. It is not easy to say exactly at what point some beliefs develop *through* repeated experience, and where

wider beliefs *influence* people's experiences. Earlier, I noted the difficulty in disentangling 'experience' from its interpretations. It is not the job of this research to work out the intricate mechanisms at work within this interplay. But some of the clearer markers of this process are worth noting for what they illuminate about how participants themselves are aware of this relationship. In the absence of any belief in the supernatural, as stated, no evidence will suffice to force a change in position. But there is often a hierarchy of status accorded to different 'grades' of evidence, dependent on a range of beliefs. Again, social context is important. Close attention to people's stories reveals ways they reinforce their own, or others', reliability as witnesses, and the way interpretations are weighed in the balance.

Cultural belief

Various assumptions are made by participants about what a haunted home should be like. I call these beliefs 'cultural' because they seem to be formed in wider society over time and permeate people's outlook and expectations. Influences include popular media representations (based on exaggerated reformulations of experience, or fictional representations from the past). I offered a brief historical context and traced the evolution of some of these beliefs at the start of the first chapter. In Chapter Three I also noted how participants compare their own experiences to these wider cultural beliefs, more often to point out differences – for example, that extreme or negative emotions are not always the primary reactions to the uncanny. There are a few examples where participants state very clearly that their experience must be 'culturally' induced. Here RM in CS1 discounts a 'vision' of the Virgin Mary in the field adjacent to her home; it is something *she* must have produced:

RM: You know how [the Virgin Mary] always wears a blue cloak and that. And – all the pictures of her are pretty much the same, aren't they? Well, that's how I perceived her. Because that's my image. If I think of the Virgin Mary, that's the image I've got in my mind... so I saw what I wanted to see. I don't think it was anything out there, I think it was totally in my brain

But elsewhere, it is not clear if people 'use' cultural conventions of the haunted home knowingly as a strategy, or if there is a genuine belief in them. In CS11, for example, H

invokes the convention of the spooky haunted home being a place of mysterious cold draughts to comfort her daughter, arguing that the family's experience differed from this and therefore the ghosts cannot pose any 'threat':

H: I heard rustling [of a silk skirt] more often [after the first experience], and my daughter had. And she put it out of her mind altogether, wouldn't talk about it. I kept saying, 'Look, there are no traditional cold winds, and our candles' – because we burn candles a lot – 'our candles don't flicker and go out'. I tried to comfort her saying, 'Look, it's not – a malevolent, it's a benign presence'. You know. 'There is no coldness about it, no threats'

Another convention is that uncanny events tend to happen at night:

RM: Some people have the idea that spooky activity happens at night. We get it day and night here

K in CS2 suggests that cultural beliefs influence her on an experiential level. But this leads to confusion: if experiences are culturally-induced, how come they *actually* happen like that? There is a sense that experiences must be 'real' despite their conventionality: there has to be a legitimate reason why these conventions arise in the first place – an interesting comment on the same conundrum expressed by Devereux (2001):

K: What I do not like [laughs] – my horror is one [a ghost] is going to pop up at night time... I suppose I've got that very age-old association that if it's happening at night time then, you know, only wicked things come out at night time, bad things happen... within the culture I was brought up with, things were abroad at night time that weren't during the day. The devil was more likely to be stalking around at night time... A lot of this is all the sort of fears... harking back to when I was a child, the sort of very primitive fear of things coming out at night time that were scary, and that ghosts occupy that category... So I don't understand why they appear at night time. Is that because you're more sleepy?

C: I don't know

K: That's what people say

For flatmate Ch, there is a greater faith in her *experience* for creating the belief that ghosts are more active at night:

Ch: From twelve o'clock on is like almost a haunting hour. Twelve midnight

C: Do you think you're influenced by the stories you were brought up with? The witching hour being midnight –

Ch: It's probably through my experience. But I have had experiences at other times of the day as well, so it doesn't necessarily mean it's always after twelve o'clock. But it tends to be

There are exceptions, but the cultural myth is based on accumulated experience.

Elsewhere, S in CS3 compares different interpretations of ghosts' behaviour, questioning whether media representations are accurate:

S: Sometimes I think television itself spooks people a lot more than it should because – you see these programmes and things are thrown across the room. And I know you get the poltergeists and things, but, they're like – you see the figure of the old man standing there and throwing the bowl at the woman, and I think, 'That doesn't happen'. And the medium I go and see says, 'They can't touch you, they can't do anything to you'. But then you see [television series] 'Most Haunted', and they can

S has to negotiate conflicting ideas about ghosts. But she prefers the 'evidence' of her own experience – which is also to subtly apply a gentler account available to her from a trusted 'expert'. Nonetheless, as described, she is no passive dupe of the popular culture she enjoys.

For some, there is a connection between supernatural and New Age beliefs and activities. Two participants – S in CS3 and V in CS9 – use psychic mediums to help interpret uncanny events. In Blackpool, the local medium is conferred absolute authority to interpret them. Her narrative – that events are caused by dead family members – is doggedly maintained throughout: the medium's word is accepted even when explanations seemed to me garbled or forced. The idea of family being around as ghosts might confer comfort during a period of mourning, but there's nothing comforting about

many of the events. The youngest daughter, G, questions the medium's interpretation in a moment of innocent directness:

G: How do you know if it's the family or not?

V: [Uneasy] Well, it's – I don't really know, darling. But –

J: It was [the medium] who tuned into them

V: Yeah. But they must tell the psychic who they are and, you know, whether they are related or not to you

G: Oh

It is important that the narrative is passed down to the children, that they all tell the same story as a 'family unit'. V has experienced previous uncanny experiences also centred around the death of family members, and these seem to set the scene for the current scenario: events reinforcing family connections. But in a similar way to CS3, there are times when the medium is tested out, *within* the parameters of belief in the supernatural. Family friend, J, for example, probes whether the medium has an accurate sense of the relationship and characteristics of the grand/parents:

J: I said to P [the medium] about – when she said your mum and dad were here. And I said to her, testing her: 'Were they together?'

The correct answer should be (and was) 'no' – the dead mother was in one corner of the living room, her dead husband in another; in life the parents had grown apart and led separate lives. Underlying this is a belief in the continuity of personality and social relations after death. As ghosts, the grandparents are assumed not to have settled their differences.

Further evidence of the medium's authenticity comes in the form of information she reveals that had not been divulged to her previously about a friend's nickname:

V: Now I hadn't mentioned his name or anything. I'd just said my husband and his friend was here... Only my mum [now a ghost] called him Desperate Dan. Nobody else has ever done it. Only my mum

C: So that's when you realised that –

V: That my mum was here. Yes

K in CS2 also expresses an interest in paranormal and New Age beliefs, and summarises her flatmates' positions. One believes in ghosts but not in anything New Age ('P finds all that hogwash'); the other believes in everything as part of the same overall system ('Ch – I sense... that's all one *package* you know. That spirits come and talk to her and tell her things'). K describes herself, with self-irony, as a 'sucker' for New Age belief. Note the way she oscillates between wanting to believe and being critical of doing so:

K: The whole world of magical, mystical, spiritualism... You resort to magic when you don't have control in your life... Fundamentally I think I want to organise my life in a different kind of way... because I used to be so fascinated... But I'm such a sucker for it... I've been to every form of psychic reader you can think of... I don't think it's a good way to structure your life around an overdependence on signs and symbols from the supernatural. That's what I've decided. As a conclusion. [Pause] I'm still not averse to throwing the tarot cards

Folklore belief

Interpretations of some events are also influenced by folklore. A thread running through all accounts, described in Chapter Three, is the *liminality* of the physical locations of events within the domestic interior. This mirrors belief in the *liminal* nature of ghosts, whilst also expressing the liminal nature of the uncanny event as an *experience*, something real but not quite real. There are also folk beliefs which emerge within the local neighbourhood through social interaction, as described. Not every participant deems it appropriate to tell neighbours of their experiences, and not every participant who does so helps a local story to circulate and take on a life of its own. It is not always possible to distinguish between what is a distinct belief with its own specific, long-standing, traceable, genealogy, from ad hoc hearsay, rumour and informal comments. At times anecdotes seem to forge themselves surprisingly quickly into something with an apparently deeper and wider status as a shared public narrative; a few repeats of a story and the seeds of local mythology take hold. It is also interesting to note how what might be deemed archaic forms of knowledge continue to exist in particular places. This is, of course, not an exhaustive study, but my case studies do back up a conventional notion of folk beliefs thriving in smaller communities where there is a continuity of habitation

(a place such as the Wiltshire rural hamlet where R in CS4 is still considered a 'newcomer' after living there for twenty years). But other case studies also show how the process of circulating local beliefs does not actually require a particularly stable community. It only takes one or two relatively longer-established neighbours to be granted authority and status as holders of the 'knowledge' of the area, including neighbours who offer information about past inhabitants which might provide evidence for the ghost's identity. The mechanisms by which such a process takes place, and the way in which shared memories circulate, have been described by Dawson (2005), whilst Brogan (1998), Bennett (1999), and Gelder (1994) all point to the openness of the ghost story which seems to lend itself to repeated retelling. Perhaps through doing so the idea of a ghost takes 'shape' and is recognised more easily as a narrative in the wider community.

CS5 provides an example of straightforward transmission. This house is situated in a village on the Wirral. The story started with a few sightings of a woman wearing a pink dress. When the new owners – my participants – moved in, they were bombarded by people curious to know if they had seen the 'Pink Lady', or wanting to tell them about her. I have already explored how this, for the sceptical husband, sets up the conditions for suggestion. He explained how 'four people... came here and introduced me to the idea of this being a haunted house', all going through the 'same protocol'. Here, his wife describes the odd behaviour of one local resident:

M: We had been there a couple of weeks. Then one day a lady was – in front of the door. I remember this conversation so well because it was rather strange. First, she was standing there with these plants in her hands – she said, 'So you decided to stay?... And then I said, 'No, we just moved in'. The next thing was, 'You are the new people living here?' I said, 'Yes'. 'Do you know the house is haunted?' It was exactly the – thing. She didn't recognise me, being a new inhabitant. The first thing to tell me was that the house was haunted... I've never seen her after that. And those plants, she was selling them for church. At least that's what she told me. But to me – it was obviously an excuse to come to talk to me... She told me, 'Yes, everyone knows in the village that in the cottage there is living a ghost called the Pink Lady'. And that she is dressed in pink clothes, has some kind of bonnet, and what else? Can't remember exactly. But then it was rather strange that in the end she said, 'Do you want to buy the plants?' 'How

much do you want for them?’ ‘Give me anything you like. Just whatever you like’ [laughs]. This obviously was an excuse to come to the door

The ghost is such a source of fascination that people seem to forget social etiquette in their desire to tell the newcomer of her inheritance. The continuity of folklore and its transmission is very direct in this instance. It is perpetuated through informal social networks, through small talk and loaded asides. But the myth doesn't move around seamlessly. Not everyone responds in the same way. Here M herself jokes to a neighbour – thus perpetuating the myth herself – but she doesn't get a response (as described elsewhere, it appears these neighbours are fearful of the ghost):

M: And if I say something like, ‘Ok, I go home and if the Pink Lady's around –’, they ignore it totally. They don't want to talk about it

Another example is CS13, the castle tower situated in a rural coastal village. When A and her now-deceased husband bought the place, they became aware of its reputation as haunted. Soon people were asking to conduct 'ghost tours', and A realised there was money to be made, and agreed to host the ghost hunters, for a cut. A expresses knowledge about the folklore of the area, although she is dismissive:

A: There was bad luck down the valley, lots of people were dying of cancer. This was four or five years ago. A dowser said it was to do with a bad spirit, and he would move it. Since then no one else has had bad experiences with cancer... [Listing other local myths, expressing scepticism] A fireball coming down from the valley was seen by people in the cottage... There's the myth of a witch on an upturned boat... [About another local manor house] People seeing ghosts there. I don't believe it

In CS9, the psychic 'takes away' an unruly spirit in a manner reminiscent of a magical act in a fairy tale. The family seem to accept this as a valid means by which a spirit can be made to exit a house, which also reinforces an invisible divide between the home's protective interior and the outside world:

V: She took him [the spirit] with her... ‘He's got to go’

C: What would she have done with him? [Pause] Sent him off somewhere?

J: She put him up her sleeve. And then says: ‘Right. He's there. When I go out the door

V: – he'll go

J: – I'll let him go'. And then she says she'll put a ball of protection around the house, so he could never get back in

The influence of folk beliefs from different European cultures was also apparent in a couple of case studies. Romanian T in CS6, for example, maintains a belief that the dead have power. This is illustrated when she had a short-term job cleaning crockery in a school which backed onto a cemetery:

T: And I looked at the graves. It sounds crazy, but I says: 'Oh, spirit of dead people who was dead here, help me to find a job'

The plea is symbolic of her own disempowered, outsider status; she has no one else to ask for help but dead strangers. She believes her prayers are answered – she does find another job soon afterwards, when she needs it. She explains in the language of superstition a number of serendipitous coincidences which have led her to make useful contacts over the years of working as a cleaner in London. Her superstition offers order and explanation in her world of fluid, random connections and chance encounters which she relies on to survive. Elsewhere, she uses a folk tradition to appease a spirit, which she assumes is causing a noise in the chimney. Her daughter translates:

O: She had a [previous rented] room on the second floor, and inside this room there was a fireplace, which they didn't use. And every time it was windy you could hear up on the chimney noises of someone was howling or crying, really sinister noises. And she couldn't sleep

T: I tell them, 'Don't cry. I give food for you. I will look after you'. And because I worked in the coffee shop, with many cakes, after the shop is closed, you can have all the cakes home, or in the bin... So I give to the friends, 'Take this' [Romanian]

O: It is like a tradition. If you have someone who is dying. For two days you have to have this really big meal and you give food for poor people in the name of the person who's died. And this is what she did. She took the cakes from the place where she worked, and she gave them to friends. And she said: 'This is for the soul that's in my chimney'

T: And then it stopped. And never came again for months

O: The next time it was windy, of course you could still hear the wind, but not the same sound

C: So it was like a ritual offering?

O: For our tradition, you have to take care of the dead people. It's like you're never forgetting them, you're mentioning their names and if you think about them or if you dream about them, you have to give something to someone who doesn't have, like an offering

C: What religion is this?

O: Catholic and Christian Orthodox. You will find the Russians will be the same. In Greece as well. They do this ritual

C: So in your religion you are honouring the dead

O: Yes

C: So the idea of ghosts isn't so strange?

T: No. It's somebody who need – no peace. He don't go in other world

Here the line between folk and religious beliefs and rituals is blurred. She appeases the 'spirit' in her chimney by adapting a religious ritual for honouring the dead. But it also becomes a social commentary, a reinforcement of the differences between Romania and her London home, a voicing of pride in her homeland:

T: There are very few ghosts seen in Romania. Very few. The priest make special ceremony when you move or paint the house. He bless the house. Because everybody takes care of the dead, it's more quiet. We put the name, we give presents. Here nobody looks – you can see half the cemetery is damaged

CS5 offers another example of folkloric tradition. M and her daughter, G, hint that they might be more receptive to the idea of ghosts because of their knowledge of Finnish mythology:

M: We have very old Pagan traditions. I think it was up to the nineteenth century, on the eastern part of the country, they still sacrificed for the old gods. Even if Christianity – it's told that – there were two religions – living everyday lives. So there was Christianity, and then there was the Paganism. Side by side. Sunday morning they came to the church, and when they came to the church, they sacrificed to the old gods. Just in

case!... It's rather fascinating that it's so deep, in Finnish people, this thinking, that some traces are still left

C: Part of the Pagan tradition includes, if I'm right, household gods and spirits –

M: All kinds of – every place. They were everywhere. But basically, it was a good thing, because they took care of the things...The rules have been forgotten now. It's the modern time... Now it's not very serious... [But] maybe they're more prepared to think unnatural things. So, the western civilisation [in Finland] is rather young, and maybe those beliefs are so deep, you know. I must say my daughters don't believe anything like that anymore... They are stories, now they are old traditional stories

Although the old beliefs are now mere 'stories' – the real becomes fictional – there is the possibility that people steeped in the culture are 'more prepared to think unnatural things'. So although M presents an analysis of the pre-modern progressed out of existence by the modern ('Western civilisation'), there is also an underlying counter-narrative pointing to a less linear one. Just as, prior to this, Christianity had to accept the continuation of Pagan rituals ('side by side'), so too is there a hint that something might still rub off from the old beliefs and inform the Finnish outlook. The transformation into a modern society is perhaps not quite complete. This echoes Pile's (2005) idea of modernity as containing ghosts rather than ghosts being the preserve of some 'pre-modern' archaic state. M shows her knowledge of history and her acute observations about the possibility of a 'deep' cultural resonance affecting the way in which (by implication) she might be influenced to believe in ghosts, or at least be more open to such a prospect.

There are also folk beliefs which are described as legends of a particular culture, but which get 'applied' to an uncanny event in a different context. In CS7, for example, M refers to the Celtic myth of the banshee, and transfers it as description and explanation for an experience in the living room of his Bristol home:

M: About two or three o'clock in the morning, I was down there. And I heard this – unearthly – the only way I can describe it was like a banshee. A cry

C: Where was it coming from?

M: Just in the room... It sounded unearthly. Quite loud. Quite human... one long sustained cry

He likens the sound to the cry of a banshee as a way of illustrating the nearest equivalent to an auditory experience that is difficult to categorise. M is, perhaps, forced here to mine stories of the imagination to explain what was, to him, real but 'unearthly'. He also superstitiously suggests there might be something more 'real' to this sound than a descriptive simile. The banshee traditionally gave off a wail around the home of someone about to die. M says he has been watching out since the experience:

*M: And I've been waiting for someone, you know – for someone to pass away! [Laughs]
But this was some time ago now*

C: Because of the Irish legend of the banshee?

M: Yes, you know. Just before a death. There's a name for it. I can't remember what it's called. The Welsh and Scots have different names

C: But no one's passed away?

M: Not so far. No

The myth hasn't made it into 'reality' because the sound did not herald an actual death. But there is a slight hesitancy in the description. It is assumed the cry happens rather vaguely 'just before a death', but what is the exact time scale? What remains unsaid, but was at least in *my* mind as M spoke, was the fact that his wife – who I never got to meet – is suffering from an unspecified illness. Throughout our conversations, she remained an unseen, disapproving presence. The connection between myth and 'reality' was never stated, and hadn't – after some years – come to pass, and therefore the banshee story remained safely that: just a legend momentarily used to describe and test out an uncanny event. But the narrative isn't closed – M doesn't want to 'tempt fate' by stating that as no one has died yet, no one will do: 'Not *so far*'.

Religious Belief

Religious belief tends to be kept separate from belief in ghosts in the literature, but, as Bowman (2004) argues, there are often overlaps. Few participants considered themselves actively religious believers. As expected, those sceptical about the supernatural tended to be ambiguous about religion. Some who are open to believing in the supernatural seem to play down their religious belief a little – perhaps not wanting to make a connection between belief in something that cannot be proven (such as the

existence of god) and what might influence them to believe in other 'realities'. But there is no rule. Some believers in the supernatural are also church-goers, others are not. However, it seems easier to believe in ghosts if there is a pre-existing religious belief:

M: I've read a lot of books on ghosts, actually

C: What started your interest?

M: Well... I think if you're a church-goer, you are likely to believe in it anyway

C: You are a church-goer?

M: Yes. Yes. I'm the church organist. Obviously if you believe – obviously you're more likely to believe in the supernatural

C: So you would suggest if you were open to that then it would lead you to be more open to the supernatural?

M: I would think so, actually. More so than somebody who didn't believe in anything. I suppose if you believe in the supernatural, you just accept these things... I mean – I just accept that whatever happens, happens. You know – There are more things in heaven and earth... I get more convinced as time went on. Obviously, I get more convinced (CS7)

D in CS8, a Catholic, is perhaps the most overtly religious of all participants. In contrast, she seems to be ambivalent about the presence of ghosts in her home. This could be a strategic move: a preference to share it with 'saints' than with potentially wayward, dead strangers:

C: There's no sense of a constant presence?

D: Spiritually, yes. Of the saints. I do believe they're watching over me

Religious belief affects the way she interprets one uncanny event: the sound of a baby's cry. She associates it with a plaque of a saint holding the baby Jesus, and also with the sound of her *own* baby at the time – who, in turn, resembled in her mind the figure of the baby Jesus on the plaque; three connected babies, one real, one ghostly, and one religiously symbolic, transforming the uncanny event into something vaguely spiritual:

D: Funnily enough, the baby Jesus looked like F... I used to associate this plaque of St Joseph with the baby for some reason. Because it was only when I brought this plaque into the house that the baby was crying... The baby Jesus is on the plaque, and he used

to cry. I used to think, 'I wonder if it's the baby Jesus that's crying?' It was only the same time that I brought the plaque in that this had happened

C: So you're thinking it was something spiritual?

D: I really don't know. Yeah. Yeah

The influence of childhood familial beliefs still persists for some. K in CS2 describes how, although rejected in adulthood, her family's religion continues to dictate her response to ghosts:

K: I'm not saying necessarily that I think the ghosts are evil... I'm just saying that I think that I grew up with this... idea that it was all very... scary... and that ghosts were somehow, not necessarily evil people, but I think because in the Catholic tradition... ghosts are unquiet spirits... I think Catholicism is very against ghostly spirits in that sense... I feel like it's the tradition I was brought up in. Which I think did present ghosts and spirits as very scary kind of things... And obviously their going on about the Holy Ghost, and about apparitions – you know how it is within religions, you can manage to maintain contradictory views simultaneously quite easily

She is conscious about *not* being conscious of these beliefs, as she describes with irony:

K: It's sort of un-thought-through. Like I haven't examined my beliefs around the supernatural or around ghosts very thoroughly. And I think what I'm left with is this sort of fear and suspicion from childhood – that can get sort of, you know, whipped up... as an adult... In a way, I'm no longer conscious of my own un-thought-through childish ideas about it

B in CS10 also seems influenced by his childhood (Catholic) religion. Describing his pivotal uncanny experience, his language falls back on religious categories – of demons and prayer – suggesting continuing allegiance to a residual religious paradigm, even if another part of himself has outgrown it. The language he uses to tell the story appears to influence his reading of the event, to be intrinsic to its interpretation:

B: I didn't think of, I don't know if I thought of God, or – prayed, or anything like that. I don't think I really had time. I think I said something like, 'Save me – A!'

Instead of praying to god, he chooses a more ‘tangible’ person – albeit one with whom he has no personal relationship. His description of the caring force of this benign rescuer, for me, suggests the influence of a religious mother-figure guarding him from the forces of evil:

B: It was the only name, the only word that occurred to me... and I was immediately protected... This demon – evaporated, disappeared. And this comfort, which remained, this weight. And I didn’t move. I felt happy. I felt accepted

Evidence, Proof and Experience

In Part A, I described different ideas about knowledge in the context of the uncertainty of the uncanny event. In the first section of Part B, I surveyed the influence of more culturally or socially specific beliefs. In this last part of the chapter, I build on these insights to explore people’s attitudes to evidence as ‘proof’ that uncanny phenomena have supernatural or natural causes.

Natural explanation first

Wherever they position themselves on the spectrum of belief, most participants use the tools of rational materialism in their appraisal of ‘evidence’. Often people’s immediate reaction is to seek a natural explanation. Rational mental processes which hunt for natural cause-and-effect physical processes pepper people’s narratives. For B in CS10 there is a pressing reason for him to assume a natural explanation – he is responsible for the house’s physical fabric. B believes in ghosts, but equally has to ensure nothing harms the house or himself. For others, the explicit recourse to an *idea* of ‘scientific’ enquiry is used to justify their conclusion that an event must be unnatural. By showing natural explanations have been discounted, the participant’s own ‘reasonableness’ is reinforced; it subtly supports their claim to be trustworthy witnesses. M in CS7, for example, runs through natural explanations as he tries to delineate between natural and unnatural domestic sounds:

M: The only other possible explanation was that [the sound of] these steps had been on the stairs of the adjoining house [but] it sounded too loud. It sounded too close at hand. I mean, because at that time we didn't have any carpet on the stairs... I went to the place and I couldn't see anything that could have caused [the crashing sound]... I couldn't see anything that could have fallen over... the garden is enclosed, because there's a high wall at the back. And [the footsteps] didn't seem [to] attempt concealment: a slow, deliberate tread... It couldn't have been caused by wind up the chimney or anything like that... that chimney's capped anyway

M in CS4 describes seeing a shadowy form from the garden moving from one room to another. The only rational explanation was that this was her husband, who was in the house:

M: I was outside looking in. And I thought my husband had something to tell me or he needed something. I came in immediately. And went upstairs to the bedroom to ask what was the problem and he was fully asleep. [Pause] Hadn't moved anywhere for – for an hour. And in the morning I asked if he was walking around. 'No'

Conversely, sometimes a sceptical witness finds a natural explanation and sticks with it, ignoring aspects of the experience which might call this into doubt. Again, 'rationality' is applied so doggedly in the face of alternate evidence it appears to become *irrational*. In CS11, H has no problem favouring a supernatural one; her husband, A, cannot make the switch:

C: Do you remember how you reacted at the time?

A: I thought, 'Well, it's the wind or something'. The wind through the eaves of the house. Or something like that. I dismissed it as a draft or something – a whistling around the old stonework, never mind the chimney or something like that

C: And have you heard similar noises like that?

A: No. No

If a natural occurrence was responsible for the sound, it might be expected to repeat itself. But A always stops short of acknowledging anything strange, despite recalling that 'somebody asked something' – a long way from the sound of wind:

A: It was a question. Somebody asked something. The intonation was, 'Will you do this?' Or: 'What's this?' 'What's that?'

C: But you decided it was the wind? [Pause] So it wasn't as if it were an actual question to you, it just sounded like one?

A: Yes, that was my interpretation of it

C: Your logic –

A: My logic, exactly

I push him, because his response doesn't make 'sense' to me:

A: I keep coming back to this question. Somebody asked a question, and we both simultaneously replied to it, or acknowledged that somebody, something, wanted some information. The intonation in the voice – 'Have you?' 'Is it?'

H: And I said, 'It wasn't me'. I knew it wasn't you

C: So when you're talking about this very specific incident, you're talking together

A: Oh yeah. We both agree on that point

H: Oh yes

C: But when you're talking generally about your beliefs, you're very scathing

A: Well. Yeah. Yeah

His wife heard a similar voice. They both responded at the same time: she came down from the attic, and he went up the stairs. They met on the landing. A cannot allow these specific circumstances to push him beyond the natural explanation, even though he is now challenged by his wife:

A: I'm sceptical about it all, quite honestly. But if someone said, 'Yes, I know, and I was there', and it's not hear-say, well, ok

H: But then what about –

A: Hooded people and rustling skirts and all that –

H: But what about us responding to the same rustling skirt? The same urgent whisper for help?

A: No. Yeah. Well

He is left inarticulate ('Well. Yeah. Yeah'; 'No. Yeah. Well'). He seems to almost, but can't quite, concede other explanations might be possible. An uncanny experience cannot be allowed to determine his general belief in the 'nature' of things.

Elsewhere, the line is drawn more clearly – a natural explanation is found without question. A in CS13, for example, is disgruntled because she is often kept awake during the night by the sound of a heavy wooden door – at the top of the castle tower's winding stone staircase, leading to a flat roof – banging open and closed in the wind. She complains that the door is left unlocked by ghost hunting groups. She has to drag herself, and her bad leg, up the stairs to close it. There is no room for ghosts; the ghost *hunters* are to blame.

One variation on the natural explanation is an assumption that unnatural processes should differ from natural ones. In CS1, an event shows evidence that physical effort has been used to drag a heavy gravestone from one place to another, leaving scuff marks on the ground:

D: It didn't look like a genuine piece of phenomenon

C: Because you expect these things to have extra powers, be able to move things without having to schlep –

D: Well, that's what we expected

C: A very human effort was needed?

D: Well, if a human being was moving the tombstone, who didn't have a great deal of muscular strength, that's how they'd do it

Despite his refusal to acknowledge the possibility of ghosts, D has specific and conventional ideas about how ghosts should authentically act. In particular, ghost-instigated events should be set apart from human-type actions, reinforcing a boundary between the material and immaterial in the contrast with the ordinary and banal.

Material evidence

CS1 is also a rare example of events which linger within the physical fabric of the home – words which fade only slowly on the walls, objects which are moved from place to place, words and pictures etched and scratched onto surfaces. Sceptic D acknowledges that these constitute ‘hard’ evidence – ‘hard’ meaning both ‘material’ and ‘robust’:

D: Most experiences of hauntings don't seem to have the hard evidence that this has got... You don't get much harder than words chiselled into walls

And yet, despite this, such evidence does not for D constitute ‘proof’ of the supernatural. As described, because D refuses this category, no amount of material evidence will ever be enough ‘proof’, merely suggesting something yet to be explained by natural laws:

D: Yes, [the parapsychologist] collected evidence. But in the end – what could he come up with? [Pause] I know of no means of accounting most experiences of hauntings – I'm not saying this is a haunting, incidentally

Later, we talked about the brown stains making up many of the words on the walls. I suggest the possibility of ‘testing’ the substance to find out what it is. There is something strange to me in D's response:

D: I meant, when I was at Sussex [University] to get it analysed. But I never got round to taking a piece of the stuff down to the chemistry department there. So whether it's a modern chemical, or whether it's made of, I don't know, goat's urine and oak gorse or something –

[Laughter]

C: Well, if you want to give me a sample, I'll take it back to Queen Mary

D: It might be worth doing, yes

C: I'm sure there's a department there

D: Getting the, um, getting the ink [from computer printouts] analysed would be interesting. We've got the – um – impressions on the walls. When did the computer phenomena occur?

When I suggested taking a sample back to my university, he politely but unenthusiastically acknowledged the offer, then shifted quickly to talk about computer print outs with strange words on them. It seemed less obvious why he would want to analyse ink rather than the more perplexing materiality of the brown stains. For a man who elsewhere prides himself on carefully examining all evidence like a forensic scientist, why does he not want to analyse the uncanny materiality he is surrounded by? Does that suggest collusion, or is it more that he doesn't *want* the evidence – the uncanny events – to become *proof* of something?

Elsewhere, historical 'facts' as well as artefacts can also provide indirect evidence of ghosts, offering depth to the narrative. Often the link is implied rather than overt. Here, RM talks about the gravestone dug up in the garden which bore the engraving of a woman's name and a date:

RM: [RM is trying to find the headstone which is standing in greenery] There is a theory as to why it was buried. They reckon that either she was in disgrace and she'd been a naughty girl and she'd got herself in the family way, because I did see the girl [the ghost of a pregnant woman]. Or if it had been a hard winter and they couldn't get her up to the church yard, they'd bury them in the garden

In CS5, as described, old pipes are found in the living room, suggesting a source for a smell of tobacco:

M: When the previous owners fixed the house – it was very badly neglected, and they bought it in an auction – and they did a lot of work, so they dig rather deep there, and they find this – small pipes

A different form of 'evidence' is available to those who knew their ghosts when they were alive: the belief that personality traits continue in death allows events to be interpreted in the light of this knowledge. In CS8, the son, F, knows he is haunted by his grandmother because he hears her call his name in a very particular way, using a unique intonation – 'dragging his name out'. She also liked a particular brand of cigarettes:

F: I can smell, like – ciggy smoke. I smoke ciggies, but she used to smoke Silk Cut, and they don't like – they smell like a different smell [to mine]. I just know she's there. Just around the house

Living householders can also inadvertently provide 'evidence'. A in CS11, for example, uncharacteristically changes his behaviour. Responding out of character becomes, in itself, proof for his wife that he did experience something genuinely uncanny:

H: I think the funniest thing – apart from us coming nose to nose – I mean, I would have moved, I'm very quick to respond to people. But A usually needs two or three requests before he – and he was there, as soon as my feet hit the floor from the ladder – A was there... I mean, A is totally phlegmatic. You have to call him five times before he might make a move... knowing A, I was the most amazed person there was about the fact that A had responded. Not that he'd heard it, but that he'd responded so quickly. That was my biggest surprise

C: So there must have been a real sense of urgency in the voice

H: Very

A: Yes there was, yep

C: So it was a sort of – protective instinct – making you rush?

H: Well, of course, A assumed it was me

A: Somebody wanted something, and I was responding

Lastly, there are many events which cause material changes in the domestic interior. Here the 'evidence' is more complex, given, as described, it needs to be distinguished from people's already dynamic relationship with the domestic interior:

T: Sometimes the door I leave it, close it, I find it open. Maybe the [land]lady, she look if I'm there or not, you know? I think... But when I saw the cushion in the middle [of the room], I didn't think it was her. And then another day the lady was very upset waiting for the daughters to come. She's shopping a lot. She has a spare fridge in the garage. And the next morning the freezer door – was open completely and defrost. And sometimes I tell her, 'Look, last night you forgot to put the alarm'. She said: 'I'm sure I put on the alarm. Or maybe my mind is going' (CS6)

T rationalises that some experiences are stranger than others. Finding a cushion (on a shoe) in the middle of her bedroom, as if it had been thrown, ranks stranger than finding the bedroom door open. The latter might have been caused by the landlady looking in at her; she is less likely to have thrown a cushion. There are further disruptive but ambiguous incidents involving freezer doors and burglar alarms; the line between supernatural high jinks and human forgetfulness can never be definitively drawn, but in such a charged atmosphere, every type of domestic disorder becomes potential evidence of the uncanny.

Experiences challenge beliefs

As described, some participants refuse to believe in the supernatural even in the light of an apparent ‘experience’. On the whole, non-believers witness fewer events than believers. This is sometimes used (as by L in CS5) as ‘evidence’ in itself that events are not ‘real’. If only *believers* see ghosts, their beliefs are *predisposing* them to do so; experience is predetermined by belief. Other explanations are also sought for this. In examples of couples divided on gender lines, it is assumed that the men have generally spent less time at home and more time at work than their wives, and therefore have less opportunity to experience uncanny events. In CS3, for example, S tries to account for the difference in their experiences by suggesting it is something to do with the routines of everyday life rather than a difference between belief and non-belief. She suggests that her fiancé hasn’t experienced anything because he is not at home much. But nor it transpires is S – they both work full time.

Beliefs passed on from previous owners or local neighbours can also have an initial impact but lose their credibility over time. In the case of CS5, M’s daughter G is at first nervous about the idea of living in a haunted home, acknowledging how the stories affected her:

G: I remember once, when it was just newly bought – this house. Because I was kind of feeling – a little bit afraid. Because also it’s a big house, and because of the stories from the previous owners, I didn’t want to sleep alone in the room [laughs]

She experiences an event for herself, and felt 'a bit stressed about that'. But she hasn't noticed anything for so long that the idea of the ghost has become distant and feels unreal, and she concludes with a tone of doubt:

G: So for a while I guess – and then we were talking about how the previous owners felt in the house, and I was – it felt very real for a while. But now I have never experienced anything. And now I have been sleeping in that room, and I – I don't feel anything there at all

Some sceptics come round to the possibility of the supernatural after witnessing uncanny events. In CS4, the builder is a sceptic who sees the ghost. R paraphrases his response:

R: And – he – saw – and he doesn't believe in ghosts. He says: 'I'm 63. I've never seen a ghost. I don't believe in ghosts'... And then he looked again and she wasn't there. So he probably thought, 'Stupid B'. You know. Yeah, he was quite – he'd seen a ghost

In CS8, a sceptical participant is forced to change his mind in the light of an event:

D: [She makes her husband investigate a baby's cry. He is convinced it is their own baby] He came in that door, and he went, 'It's not the baby. He's fast asleep'. We said: 'There you are. You've heard it now, haven't you?' And he said: 'I can't believe'. He said: 'He's fast asleep and the baby's crying in the house'

Elsewhere, A in CS12 also expresses unease about believing in ghosts for a similar reason as some of the other women, such as R in CS4 – that she is well-educated and rational. But she has to accept the evidence of her own experience:

A: I didn't believe in this kind of thing. I'm not crazy. The things that happen just cannot be ignored. I used to think, once you're dead, you're dead. I'm a highly intelligent person. I'm not supposed to believe these sorts of things! Yes, it's totally changed my beliefs

A further example concerns the father of S in CS3. Another sceptic – ‘You can tell him something and he’d be like, ‘Yeah, right’’ (S) – he has an experience which is particularly prized by S as good quality corroborative evidence:

S: My dad... he was sat in the [ground floor] backroom, with the back bedrooms above... And heard these big, heavy footsteps above him. And he thought, ‘That’s a bit strange’. And he said it was definitely above him as opposed to a next door noise... It was the footsteps in the back room above him that made him – think again

C: So your dad, once sceptical –

S: Now he’s not

Her father was apparently happy to admit to the experience and able to incorporate it into an expanded world view. Elsewhere, however, in CS9, the husband/father becomes a figure of fun. Here he refuses to get out of bed during a night of dramatic poltergeist-like events, where many objects were thrown around the downstairs rooms:

C: How did you feel?

V: Terrified. I phoned P [the medium] and she –

G: Mum was crying

V: – came out, didn’t she? She got a taxi over here

G: Dad didn’t believe it. He said, ‘Oh, just leave it’

V: Yeah! ‘And go back to bed!’ [Laughter]

A: Dad was upstairs in bed. He didn’t even come down. We went in and – [can’t hear over laughter]

V: He did! He just stayed in bed! He left us to face it!

A: We went up and asked him to come down, told him what was happening, and he said: ‘Oh, forget it!’

Nonetheless, there is a hint that he is coming round to the idea that the home might be haunted:

C: You mentioned that [the husband] was quite sceptical to begin with

V: Yes, he was. He didn’t believe at all, did he?

C: Even at that stage? [We had been discussing a number of events]

V: That was the first thing that made him start thinking that maybe – [kids laugh; she joins in] there is something

C: Now he's accepted it?

V: Yes. Or starting to anyway

Seeing is believing

In Chapter Four I touched upon a desire *not* to see as a strategy of co-habitation. To see a ghost is to suggest for it a level of 'reality', a point explored further earlier in this chapter. Seeing might be the least utilised sense, and often, in any case, constitutes something indistinct – a vague or shadowy form, something in the peripheral vision. But it is the kind of witnessing accorded most status as evidence, suggesting the continuing cultural ascendancy of sight. The rationalist credos of 'seeing is believing' is often taken for granted as a benchmark against which events are judged.

For some participants, the desire to see the ghost is greater than a desire for distance, because seeing confers a level of 'proof' not possible otherwise. But seeing is not enough for others, who will not allow, as described, any evidence to sway disbelief; experience counts for nothing. L in CS5 offers his manifesto for why he doesn't believe in ghosts:

L: Number one, it doesn't make any sense to me. And number b, I have never seen any evidence of any of that in any way. Quite frankly, you know, typically speaking. And number three, I have absolutely no personal experience of that

He cannot believe because he hasn't experienced anything. This suggests, I argued, that someone who *has* had an experience must therefore be allowed to believe. He conceded the logic, but returned to his default position – faulty neurological processes:

C: So evidence to you means personal experience?

L: Personal experience. Yes

C: So the experiences of somebody who you obviously trust, like your wife -

L: But it wouldn't be – because – her brain might be making the mistake – in fact, her brain would be making the mistake almost certainly! I mean, I have been a director [of

neurology] for thirty years and I've seen all kinds of things, you know – I mean, even in high fever you may go into delirium, and you hallucinate. You know. It's commonplace. What I'm saying is... it is brain-generated, and the rest of the brain doesn't understand that. So the interpretation is: 'I must have seen something'

For some, seeing is not enough for a similar reason: they doubt the ability of 'sight' to confer absolute proof, even if they have had an experience and they are otherwise open-minded. RM in CS1 talks about seeing things 'in the corner of the eye'. But she also describes a more distinct vision of a 'flesh and blood' monk, and also the ghost of a pregnant woman who is so 'real' she assumes she is a visitor. But she remains ambiguous about these:

RM: I've seen [the ghosts]. I still think I'm projecting. It's coming from me... I think my mind was playing tricks, but that's what I saw

She *sees* an image, it is a product of her mind, yet at the same time, 'seeing is believing': her mind played tricks *but* that's what she saw, not 'that's what I saw, but my mind played tricks'. Clearly, people don't doubt everything they ordinarily see. But it might be easier to believe that the mind plays 'tricks' over things which don't belong *ordinarily* in the world anyway. At the same time, and despite this phenomenological angst, there appears to be a deeply ingrained common-sense assumption that on an objective level, we have to believe what we see. There is an oscillation between a psychological explanation and one which confirms such reality. This creates a tension between ideas about experience and the experience itself. RM next questions the validity of an event, but the act of recalling the incident seems to convince her afresh:

RM: I'm not sure what other people have seen is the same as what I've seen. Other people have had experiences. It's not just me [gives an example of a disbelieving writer who sees the monk during a radio broadcast from the living room]. And he kept stopping. So I said: 'What's the matter, Phil?' He said: 'Well, there's this figure walking up and down'. [Laughs] 'Oh', I said, 'So pleased you've seen it! I see it frequently'. I get it, I mean, at the corner of my eye, you know, you see the figure. And I do that. But – other people have had experiences. People have seen the monk

What is frustrating for her is that her husband isn't one of them. But even if he did have a visual encounter, he would always find a natural explanation for it:

C: He hasn't seen the monk, or the girl?

RM: No, unfortunately. But if he did he'd probably think he'd had a dodgy curry... For D, even if the monk walked through him, now, he'd still think I had a film projector or something... I just wish he'd see the apparitions. But as I say, if he did he'd think he'd had a dodgy curry or something

D does claim to have experienced words 'pop out' on a wall in front of him. But this is rather tame compared to seeing a human-like shape with the possibility of agency. Despite the rationalism at the heart of the 'seeing is believing' premise, he would still not allow this to be enough, much in line with L in CS5. But whilst RM toys with a psychological explanation, she can't help ultimately believing what she sees, especially when the ghosts appear to her as 'flesh and blood':

RM: I saw a monk walking that way with his cowl up and – I just saw a flesh and blood monk

There is also a unique issue concerning the role of 'witnessing' in this case study. As described, unlike in other examples, where events tend to be short-lived, unexpected and episodic, here they often linger. What becomes significant is the fact they are not witnessed more often in the *process of becoming*. D, for example, points out how certain words have been chiselled out and painted over, describing a laborious and time-consuming process. *Not* witnessing such a process becomes part of the uncanny narrative.

For R in CS4, seeing is key to believing. This rankles because she *hasn't* seen her ghost, whilst others have. What she *has* witnessed (the result of pictures being moved) is not in the same league:

R: And also, no, if I'd seen a ghost I'd believe in them. And this is what B the builder said: 'I don't believe in them. But now I've seen a ghost'. You know. Very sensible chap

C: You sent me an email with the latest –

R: Yes

C: – And then you said to me, ‘Now I know’

R: Yeah

C: So, what’s your relationship to evidence?

R: That’s not enough, no. I think my relationship to reality would have to be that I would have to see her. I think. Before I believed. I’d have to have something even spookier happen, like I would have to watch it [a painting] move, you know. Or, like, watch her. It would be fantastic if she was invisible and suddenly she went [does a gesture] and moves the picture, and puts it right

C: You say it would be ‘fantastic’?

R: Or, if my jams – yes. Or say I put jams – I put jams on the window sill because when the light shines through, you know, they look like jewels. It’s lovely... If I saw her looking at the jams again, say, then I’d believe it. It would be wonderful. That would be the most amazing thing. Because then I would know that there was another dimension. Then you could start thinking: ‘Your dad’s in heaven. You’re going to meet your dad again’. But I’m not up for, you know – needing that

Here she fantasises about the end of doubt – ‘fantastic’, ‘wonderful’, ‘amazing’ – the certainty of *knowing* there is ‘another dimension’. She quickly moves to stress she doesn’t need such reassurance, the comfort of the afterlife, but personalises the emotional significance of this – the ability to look forward to seeing her dead father:

R: I haven’t got enough evidence, you know. If I’d seen a ghost, I’d be telling the world!

As she hasn’t seen the ghost, she won’t allow herself to fully believe, she cannot have such certainty.

Corroborating experience

Corroborative accounts, where other people experience the same events, separately or simultaneously, are given much weight as ‘evidence’, as implied in some of the above examples. Although its status varies, corroboration potentially allows a switch in interpretation from the broadly psychological to something more substantially ‘out there’. To return, for example, to the CS1 event of a ‘vision’ of the Virgin Mary in the field; RM moves through different explanations. She starts, as described, with the fact

that her 'vision' conformed to a cultural stereotype and therefore must have been a mental projection. Meanwhile, her husband is categorical:

D: There is no corroborative evidence for that at all

But then the terms of RM's narrative change. She describes her daughter and friend standing at the top of the field at the time as she sees the vision:

RM: Then the girls ran down, and [friend] N said, 'Oh mum', she said, 'While we were standing there, we felt – we didn't see anything, but we felt a presence beside us'. And I hadn't said anything to them

She allows her vision some validity after all because there is corroboration. The last sentence is emphatic, but doesn't speak to the previous belief that the vision was in her head. The story ends there, floating in suspension, its contradictions unacknowledged, but with a rather strong hint that annoys D:

D: [speaking over RM's head] People tend to find what they're looking for, in my experience!... It's hardly confirmation is it? The rest is hearsay

In the next example, D in CS8 starts to doubt herself until another family member experiences the same thing:

D: [On hearing the cry of a baby] Well, sometimes you think to yourself, 'Is there a baby next door?' And then you'd think, 'Is it me? Am I going mad?' You know. Then my daughter heard it. She heard the baby

In CS4, R backs up her beliefs by pointing to the responses of other people.

Corroboration, as described, is still a weaker form of evidence compared to the key goal which alludes her: to see her ghost. But two recent witnesses have done so, and their accounts are very consistent. Both see a 'tiny' lady with an apron criss-crossed at the back, hair in a bun, back towards them, staring in the same direction out of the back windows. They are similar experiences *but* are witnessed separately. Their responses also mirrored each other. They both avoided telling R in case she might get frightened.

Their protectiveness and sensitivity to her feelings becomes part of the corroboration account. There is no suggestion of boasting or exaggeration:

R: Now they didn't tell me about the ghost. Neither him nor my friend. Right? This is the amazing thing... And they both saw her looking down the back way... And he didn't tell me because he didn't want to frighten me... And she didn't tell me. Neither of them told me because they didn't want to frighten me. But it came out that... B must have told me eventually or something. I must have said: 'I'm not scared of ghosts', and he said, 'Oh well'. Something like that. So then I told her and she said, 'I didn't like to tell you'. But they both saw the same thing

A further witness – a daughter's friend – also described seeing the ghost, but R discounts this because she is unsure whether her daughter had previously mentioned the ghost to him. Most convincing of all is a conversation with neighbours with a long-standing connection to the hamlet. This impresses R and her family so much that they – *almost* – allow themselves to accept this corroborative evidence as *proof*. Their excitement, as previously described, is short-lived. In the cold light of the next day, they react against certainty with more scepticism, a collective boomerang response from one extreme to another. In the end, corroboration is not enough. They need to maintain the 'seeing is believing' ethos. No one else's experience, however similar, will do:

R: My mum's got very sceptical recently – 'I'll believe it when I see it'. We've been given more evidence, but more evidence has made us more cynical

C: What evidence?

R: We went to a local party. Up the hill, about 100 to 150 yards away... And N is going on 80 and they knew the evacuees. But they're not very friendly... So he said to me: 'Have you seen the ghost yet? Miss B?' He said: 'You know the S's who lived in the cottage before you... Mr S has seen her. Mrs S has seen her... Most of all, the son, who lived in a caravan, went into the house and saw Miss B going through their things. He was going to buy the house, but after he saw the ghost he got a fright and never bought it. I've seen her'. He delivered logs to her when she was alive. The matter of fact way! My friend C, B the builder, have both seen her – they don't know the people up the hill... Mrs P, who's about 70, just nodded. 'Yes'. 'Was she very little?' He just took it for granted. I went back and told [my daughter] and her eyes went as big as saucers. 'That

must mean it's true. There is life after death. But I don't believe it'. I think 'rational materialism'. We don't know. Mum too. 'I just don't believe it'

C: So despite hearing more evidence for the ghost at the local party, you all became more sceptical, not less. That's odd

R: Yes. We had a rational day the next day. It must have been a reaction. But I'm waiting to hear the next thing

The neighbours, who she describes as unfriendly, eventually invite her to a party and talk of her ghost in a 'matter of fact' way. The story told by the eighty-year-old patriarch of the hamlet is a clear example of the way long-standing neighbours are conferred authority; the accounts they offer are afforded much status. But the family has a 'rational day' the next day. R alludes knowingly to her 'rational materialist' position; even the mother seems to lose her belief in the ghost. But R psychologises their response. They didn't want it to be true, or not so clear-cut – perhaps another example of the freedoms of uncertainty, or perhaps it was just too strange for their 'rational' minds to comprehend or incorporate, being presented by such an exciting treasure trove of witness accounts. The 'flaky' people proved right! Restoring rationality was, R says, an *emotional* response. But in the next breath, she reinforces her continuing hopeful openness. Like others, she defers certainty into the future.

The figure of the knowledgeable neighbour also becomes an important verifier of experience on a number of other occasions. In CS3, for example, S finds out about the previous owners from the next door neighbour:

C: Everything you know about the couple is from the woman next door, is that right?

S: Yes... M [the boy] told me what the [ghost of the] man looked like... And I mentioned it to the lady next door. And she said: 'Oh, that sounds like [previous owner] T'. And I told her that we've heard things, and you know

C: How come she had a photo?

S: She used to come in and look after him when his wife was ill

C: Did you show the photo to M?

S: Yes

C: And he said definitely?

S: He said that was – he said: 'What are you doing with that photo? That was the man that was in the room'

I described earlier the role that gender plays in determining attitudes to belief in the supernatural, and also how a previously male sceptic is, for one participant (S in CS3), better 'back up' than nervous believers (her sister and mother); the less likely the witness, the more robust the testimony. In CS11, one witness is particularly unlikely on gender grounds – a 'big burly' rugby player:

H: [Describes an annual folk ritual where the young people let their hair down for a night] [Their son] brought back after midnight three friends... In his bedroom up here... And – they were big, burly boys. One of them was a rugby player. Huge, big lad. M. And our son said: 'Something went on that night, mum. It was dark still, and M was trembling like a leaf. And he actually climbed over me to sit and tremble against the wall – between me and the wall – on my bed'. And M hadn't been – I mean, huge, burly rugby player. And he wasn't able to explain what had happened to him, what had scared him

[Pause]

A: He never came in this house again, did he?

H: No

A: He wouldn't come here

H: No. My son still doesn't know what scared the lad so much. The other two slept on

A: He won't come near the place

H: We've never seen him since!

The emphasis is on the juxtaposition of 'big burly' rugby player and 'trembling like a leaf'. His status as alpha-male is emphasised as a way of tacitly suggesting there must have been something rather than nothing happening. The fact that the witness doesn't give voice reinforces his role as a representation of a conventional category rather than a complex individual. The experience so impressed even the stubbornly sceptical A that he acknowledges it as odd:

A: It doesn't alter the fact that a group of friends, of fairly close friends – this lad just disappeared off the scene as far as this house is concerned. He just didn't want to have anything to do with it

Corroboration of belief in the supernatural can also be more general, rather than to do with specific events. For T in CS6, folklore is not just hearsay, but offers actual evidence; if more than one person repeats the same story, it must be true. She describes a researcher she had met, studying gypsy life:

T: And when he finish I ask, 'Are you happy with researchs?' 'Oh, everybody say the same story'. I say, 'It's the same story because this is the truth! If one say one, another one different, so what is the truth? But when it is everybody say the same, sorry. So this is the truth'

C: You're saying there's no reason not to believe these things because so many people have similar experiences

For A in CS13, the 'real' – for which there is 'evidence' – fills her with more excitement than the thought of ghosts. She talks of a secret smugglers' passage from the local cove to her building. She 'knew' this passage existed because she'd 'seen the entrance and the exit of it'. But when workmen came to build an adjacent house, they dismissed the story, she claimed, to avoid the delay of carrying out a historical survey, and probably filled it in. But she *knew* it was there, even though it can no longer be *seen*. She then listed evidence for other hidden or unseen elements of the history of the place – a previous house in the grounds, Medieval and Stone Age remains. These are the 'facts' that make it into the history book she is writing. But there is slippage in her narrative, a subtle shift to embrace wider forms of 'evidence'. For example, she accepts that 'sensible' people believe in ghosts after witnessing events:

A: It's all in the mind. And yet there are very sensible people who believe they have experiences. They're quite sensible. These touchy, feely people having funny experiences

She even concedes that a woman was writing a 'sensible' ghost book. I joked that perhaps, for her, saying 'sensible' and 'ghost' in the same breath – she finished my sentence: 'Is a contradiction?' The writer, she explained, had properly researched her stories, wasn't just repeating myths or hearsay, therefore she was right to call such a ghost book 'sensible'. I pressed her further. If ghost stories could be researched as 'history', by rational people, would she allow such experiences to overlap with her category of 'historical evidence'? Her first response was denial. Knowledge of the

history of the castle put ideas into people's imaginations which, in turn, conjured the ghosts. She pointed to a legend that a murder took place in the bedroom: 'People can work that up in their minds'. But later she mentioned the ghost of a monk, giving examples of different sightings, and admitting she was beginning to take this seriously:

A: There might be something in the monk story... I do think there must be something in it... The monk is the only one I'm convinced of

Sightings of the monk made sense to her because his existence could be verified; a previous owner had been excommunicated for attacking a monk who had come to gather tithes. The monk is even mentioned in a history pamphlet about the castle:

And what about ghosts? A black-robed monk has been seen more than once by the present owners of the Carter's cottage. Could this be the monk from H Abbey, denied his dues in 1330, come to reclaim them?

The monk is granted a privileged position, making it into a written account otherwise reserved for 'facts'.

Testing the ghosts

In some case studies, participants actively intervene in an attempt to gain proof of their ghost. Some experiment to entice ghosts to appear or communicate. They do this by setting up *material* 'conditions' which they consider might work as a trigger. Often these reflect a mixture of ideas about ghosts being both super-human and rather banally 'ordinary'. In CS3, for example, S takes to psychic readings the little plastic cat found in the house, presumed to have been left by the previous inhabitants (now the ghosts):

S: The only time it ever gets moved – it sounds really silly – is when... every so often I'll go to a medium night. And I'll take that with me in my pocket... I just take it and think, well, if I take it with me, and they wanted to come through, they'd know it was me by having this little cat. But nothing has ever come through

S assumes that an object which belonged to the ghosts when they were alive will somehow act as a conduit. At another time, she leaves objects which would allow the

ghosts to communicate *as if* they were still alive – although she also accepts the absurd impossibility of bridging the gap ('nothing obviously got left'):

S: When my friend's son was sat here, when he saw him [the ghost of an old man], I left a little paper out and a pen and I said, 'If you want to leave me a message, you leave it'. But nothing obviously got left

R in CS4 also challenges the ghost to create an event, and when it does happen, she decides this is a form of 'evidence':

R: There's this damn picture that nobody could touch... And hanging there, on a slant. I mean pictures don't generally, do they? Pictures go slanty when people knock them, when people touch them. They don't do it on their own, do they? So I went to bed, here was this picture on a slant. I thought, 'Oh, man'. I deliberately put it straight. And I thought, 'Right. That is so strange'. This is midnight. In the morning, there it was on a slant again. I thought, 'Right. You definitely exist'. I just wanted to prove that she does exist. I thought, 'This is strange. I want to really see this tomorrow'. And there it was. And, I mean, this cottage has stood here for four hundred years. I don't believe it's subsidence, you know. It's on a flat plot of ground. So what's she playing at?

She runs through the usual natural explanations, but the experiment to test her theory of the ghost – 'I deliberately put it straight' – wins the day. She also tests the ghost, as described, by replicating a particular set of conditions where the ghost had previously been seen: admiring jams on a window sill. She assumes that the ghost's appearance is *linked* to the jams, and, as described, that the ghost responds in the same way as R; that the aesthetic and sensory pleasure of such a sight is shared. By creating the same effect, she hopes the ghost will be moved to re-appear:

R: I made a lot of jams this summer and piled them up at the window to try to attract her

C: That relates to a previous sighting of Annie

R: Yes, she was seen looking at the jams and her hands went up like this as she looked, in admiration

C: So you placed the jams in the same place they were when that happened?

R: Yes. But it didn't work

T in CS6 also tests out the ghost by asking it to 'prove' its existence by responding to her command. She is helping in the kitchen of her landlady during a dinner party. Guests have brought flowers, which T has been asked to place into vases, which stayed in the kitchen with her ('I don't go in the room with the guests'). As she washes plates, she saw the flowers move, as if by wind:

T: But it's not wind. I say: 'Ok, you are here. But if you are here, move the flowers!' I look. One flower – Doo!' [she gesticulates a flower collapsing downwards] I said, 'Oh, maybe one was broken before'. Then the flowers were shaking like this – look, like this

O: As if there was like wind

T: But there wasn't in the room, nothing

O: There wasn't a draught

T: I say, 'Ok, you're here. If you're here, move a flower!' And then I put plates back, and I look and one flower was down, like that! And I make laugh

Again, there is apparent proof through a direct response – through communication by action; natural causes have already been discounted.

Uniquely, there is a case study where the participants themselves are tested – by a parapsychologist they allow to investigate. D in CS1 backs up this researcher, as described, in suspecting his wife. He also seems aware that I might suspect *him* also, such is the tension in the house:

RM: I mean there's nothing that couldn't be hoaxed in this house. I don't think.

Although there are some things that you wonder how the heck –

D: Well, the hard one to hoax is the chiselling. Because you know, you need time, when you know you're going to be undisturbed to paint the plaster, sweep up the mess – as for cutting it into the sand stone, you really do need time to finely chisel the words well. Our researcher was suspicious of you, wasn't he?

RM: [Laughs] Yeah

D: Because you were the person who had time uninterrupted

They become united at one point, in their agreement that they could in fact be carrying out the hoax together – by admitting that, it suggests their innocence:

D: It is perfectly true that between us, um, we probably have the skills to do all of them

RM: I mean it could be a family effort. We're conning the world. I dunno why

But D also gives specific examples of suspicious events. A camera pointed at a wall stops recording, and when it starts again, words have appeared in the interim. The uncanny events themselves become 'anomalies', in relation to the search for evidence and proof of the cause or culprit. The researcher 'found two or three anomalies which you need to know', D assuming here that my main interest is also in analysing the evidence. He argues with his wife over the robustness of 'evidence' the researcher produced:

RM: I never found that explanation convincing at all

D: The explanation was entirely convincing

RM: No, it wasn't

Another 'anomaly' was the emergence of a Welsh word on a wall which contained a spelling mistake – 'the kind of spelling mistake that you might well make if you were unfamiliar with the language' (D). The researcher also pointed out that the words and images always appeared where it was easy to reach and see – between picture frames, for example, rather than behind a radiator. This conveniently occurred next: a carving behind a radiator. Another question was why the images or words appeared so quickly but didn't fade quickly. Soon after, this also happened, although in an 'unconvincing' way: 'It looked as if polyfiller or something similar had been put into the [carving of the] monk and then painted over' (D). The very absurdity of these incidents leaves D with more questions:

D: Those points are significant. Because they need explaining. Do you have a spook that sets itself up deliberately?

The job of haunting here is, for D and the researcher, rather amateurish, not done properly. It has to be a hoax, because hoaxers are more likely to 'get things wrong' than real, authentic spooks. The evidence gathered might be *against* the witnesses, who become potential instigators of events rather than guilty of the lesser crime of gullibility. D positions himself above and beyond the possibility of doubt, because *he* is such a major doubter:

RM: [The researcher] was too gullible at the start

D: To my mind [laughs] he's not sceptical enough!

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the complex relationship between different types of belief and the experience of uncanny events. It suggests, firstly, the way in which different beliefs and systems of knowledge overlap and inform, or trouble, one another. We should indeed take heed of Bowman's assertion that to understand religion (and, by extension, geographies of belief more generally) we need to pay attention to the relationships between 'official, folk and individual beliefs and practices' (Bowman, 2004: 5). In some cases, a witness will change his or her belief or understanding of the world after an experience, others are reluctant to do so. For a majority, the hunt to 'authenticate' their experience by recourse to conventional methods and ideas is an ongoing struggle and participants deal with the challenge of witnessing events in different ways. Established systems work side-by-side more informal influences to help construct narratives to explain experience. Social networks – of childhood, family, friends, neighbours – become important in determining the ways ideas about the uncanny are circulated, developed, and tested. Religious beliefs past or present, popular culture, local myths passed through word of mouth, all have to be weighed up, navigated, accepted or rejected. As described in Chapter Four, story telling may confer positive benefits for participants, but it is also intrinsic to the process of 'making sense'. Meaning, however, is not always easily conferred.

There is also the broader notion of belief as a system of knowledge, and this becomes a key issue as participants attempt to question what they 'know' in the light of the uncanny; the primary challenge is to negotiate a route through what is knowable in the face of the apparently unknowable. Perhaps unsurprisingly, as assumed in many theoretical interventions, rationalist materialism maintains a central place as the dominant paradigm. People position themselves in various ways within or against the assumed set of ideas and processes it contains. Even those who trust their experience and believe in the existence of ghosts feel they have to justify their position, and sometimes deeply question it, in the light of this paradigm. But Pile (2005) is certainly right; ghosts are not just pre-modern anachronisms, but are 'alive' within the modern

urban landscape. This project, then, extends Pile's ideas within the site of the domestic interior and the locales where people live. But he is only right so far. Ghosts, or talk of them, might continue to be ubiquitous, but they are often side-lined as peripheral rather than taken for granted as a central aspect of life. They are contested even as they are experienced, and this adds to the insecurity of participants, who already often doubt or question the 'authenticity' of what they witness. Those who want to believe are often at pains to be seen as 'rational', using what they assume as rational methods of investigation in the way they interrogate evidence and seek for an elusive 'proof'. Centrality is given to the rationalist maxim of 'seeing is believing'. This is questioned by some people because of an understanding of other '*scientific*' beliefs, such as the way neurological and psychological processes work to create 'false' experience.

At the same time, there is also an acknowledgement of, and a positioning of ideas around, the very *uncertainty* of the uncanny events, and of the 'existence' of ghosts. This bears out Holloway and Kneale's (2008) insight that uncertainty – and its response, hesitancy – is central to spectral geographies. Participants themselves have to negotiate such slippery, ungraspable terrain in their everyday lives. Embracing uncertainty becomes a challenge to the categories of rationalist materialism itself, speaking back to their limitations.

If, as described, the fact of uncertainty also, indeed, creates for some a more desirable *emotional* space in which to dwell within the haunted home, its acceptance is not just an exercise in textual politics, but, again, a way of negotiating the intimate and social contestations arising out of everyday life. Within some households, for example, the continuing gender politics underlying the rational materialist ethos is also exposed, with women generally seeking more nuanced or open ways of 'knowing' the world but forced to defend their positions in materialist terms. Kuhn's belief in an opposition between 'dominant ways of knowing' and what she calls 'knowledge from below' (Kuhn, 2002: 120) does – surprisingly, perhaps – continue to hold true; it is, as she suggests, a gendered opposition played out within the dynamic of heterosexual relationships, at least in many case studies explored here.

The different positions taken – often within individuals – show how fluid and complex the process of making sense is for many. Bennett and Bennett (2000) are right to assume that people choose between two opposite positions: supernatural belief as a

separate 'alternative' to mainstream scepticism. But this misses the ways in which many people position themselves between these poles or attempt to *negotiate* between them, and also downplays the different factors which come into play during such a process. It misses, in particular, the importance of the more complex contextual detail of experience in the struggle for legitimacy and authenticity.

The way, more generally, 'experience' is scrutinised rather than taken for granted allows a useful exploration of the ways that participants themselves question subject-object relations, battle with the insecurity of their own 'gazing' subjectivity, the reliability of their own, and others', witness, and call into question the 'authenticity' of their own experience more generally. As Kuhn says, 'experience' needs to be questioned as the 'trump card of authenticity, the last word of personal truth, forestalling all further discussion, let alone analysis' (Kuhn, 2002: 33). This is what many participants do. But, as Kuhn adds, there is a lot at stake, given experience is a 'key category of everyday knowledge' (ibid). The negotiation, between aspects of self which have memories and feelings, and aspects of self which think and analyse, suggests the importance of investigating the interplay between representation and affect, as Papoulias and Callard (forthcoming) argue. Sometimes participants try to explain away experience of uncanny events as being informed by, even created by, wider mores. Participants engage and grapple with the relationship between their experiences and the various beliefs which might explain them, at different levels of awareness. The repetition of the story of an event does shape the narrative, but also offers time for reflection, and for allowing wider interpretations to be weighed in the balance.

The tantalising openness of such experiences, accurately pondered by Devereux (2001), also explains both the uncertainty and hesitancy of enquiry, but also a continuing wider drive for meaning. An actual arrival at the destination of certainty, of rational 'coherence' is, of course, only possible for those who maintain an extreme position along the continuum. But these people often have to ignore aspects of experience which suggest the possibility of an opposite viewpoint. For many, this relationship between what they experience and how they might interpret it can never be fully resolved; experience, indeed, exceeds representation. Narratives might lend themselves to more coherence than might be warranted, might for example be sharpened didactically into set positions of belief or knowledge when challenged. But for most, it is an ongoing process of recall and narration. Frosh (2007) is wrong to parody the process of narrative

as always creating a false 'coherence' of self and experience. Participants themselves for the most part don't need any help in understanding the complexity, the incoherent aspects, of the process they are involved in. Uncanny events are, as Luckhurst says, 'points of pressure' compelling a 'rethinking or extension of knowledge formation' (Luckhurst, 2004). And when the narrative poses questions, the qualitative analysis picks these up, attends to the 'gaps' which emerge – the points when people let ideas float in the air, swiftly change topic, contradict themselves, or when interpretations appear too neat or complete in relation to their context. It is experience itself which always hovers over explanation; the ghost of the past moment to be constantly grasped for. And it is the way people grasp – the memories, the emotions, the words and ideas from personal and social narrative, cultural beliefs and local stories – which become part of the event, as much as and also informing the apparently non-discursive moment of encounter itself.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In this research I have set out to examine the experience of living in ‘haunted homes’ and the many questions implied by such a project. The research material gathered has suggested the focus of each substantive chapter. Firstly, I explored the relationship between materiality and immateriality within the physical spaces of home. The interviews revealed the complexity of the haunted domestic interior, its multiple agencies and temporalities. In doing so, it also illuminated the complexity of ‘everyday experience’: the familiarity of the strange, the strangeness of the familiar. Next, I investigated the strategies people employ in their attempt to successfully co-habit with ghosts. The material suggested many different ways uncanny experience is imagined, contained and categorised. Lastly, I scrutinised people’s beliefs about ghosts, and how these might be informed by a wider social and cultural context. The material suggested the interplay of a spectrum of interpretations and ideas. The way these are often contested within individuals and households also suggested the continuation of particular relations of power.

These insights, which developed the themes explored in the introduction, informed the framework of the chapters. But I also noticed that they, in turn, revealed a number of cross-cutting themes, which sometimes recurred in similar ways, sometimes differently. I will next offer a broad overview of these themes and where they emerged. I will end the section with a reflection on the haunted home as a liminal space and experience.

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

Familiarity

In **Chapter Three**, a major insight became the ‘familiarity’ of the strange within the haunted home. Uncanny sounds were similar to, even the same as, those attached to everyday domestic or social processes. People are also able to incorporate many uncanny events into their domestic routines, accept them as ‘normal’, or become used to them over time. Even novel events are incorporated, although they might jar at first. In **Chapter Four** the emphasis became *making* familiar rather than *being* familiar. People attempt to contain the level of ‘strangeness’ in the haunted home, or keep it within bounds. The uncanny ideally becomes personalised as a *someone*, conventional, ordinary, unthreatening, not too different from ‘self’ in terms of sharing similar values or ideas of social etiquette, including a *wish* to keep distance, respect privacy; and where possible, the ghost is also a female. In **Chapter Three**, then, it is *as if* the events are often ordinary and familiar in their very nature; whilst in **Chapter Four**, they *become* ordinary through effort; the source of the event might be supernatural, but is rendered within the bounds of normalcy despite this. Keeping the ghosts *within* bounds on one level allows participants to maintain their own boundaries – keeps the ghosts *out* of bounds, on another.

In **Chapter Five**, attempts are also made to make the uncanny familiar by making it *known*, understandable, give it ‘meaning’. Much effort is put into creating a coherent narrative. This is sometimes about trusting a belief that experiences are *real* because of an experiential knowledge of the materialities of the home, emerging from intimate, familiar, everyday interaction, allowing the different sounds of the home to be distinguished. The process also includes creating *personal* meaning as well as *social* meaning through repeated, shared memories and narratives. Underlying much of this effort is a desire to trust one’s own experience, the question of what one can ‘know’ informed by an intersection of the wider scales of paradigm and knowledge formation with the intimate scales of the familiarity of everyday life. Alternatively, one might not understand an uncanny event, but can still accept it and the idea that there are different types of knowledge possible about the world; to accept an excess of meaning in the excess of material and sensory experience. These are different ways of making the

uncanny move towards the ‘familiar’ – almost giving it a ‘reality’ that fits what is already known and taken for granted.

Uncertainty

There is a contrasting theme emerging through the thesis. The uncanny might be ‘familiar’, but this familiarity is always contingent upon the uncanny’s *uncertainty* and unknowability. **Chapter Three** deals with the uncertainty of the uncanny as a sensory event within the material processes of everyday domesticity. What is made familiar is already uncertain in fundamental ways: uncanny events are unpredictable, of unknown cause, don’t follow known ‘laws’, don’t communicate anything directly, might not be ‘meant’ to be witnessed at all, and might be mistaken for ordinary material processes. Events often happen *elsewhere* – footsteps, singing, name calling: auditory experiences of home often involve *other places not here*. Haunted events are peripheral; when an event is experienced near and here, it is often the most challenging. Events are also uncertain in terms of the level of the witness’ awareness of them; they often happen when participants are preoccupied, focused on a domestic task. They highlight the already slippery nature of the moment of encounter.

In **Chapter Four** the uncertainty of the event becomes the uncertainty of the relationship between ghost and participant. As described, strategies try to contain uncertainty; but this is only possible *because* of the very uncertainty of the ghost. Keeping experience vague allows people to use their imagination, to fantasise the ghost in the image or attitude they want. **Chapter Three** focuses on the tantalisingly small gap between uncanny and ordinary in the domestic interior. It is *as if* the noises are real or the cat still has fur and weight; the ghost is *like* a person; the footsteps *like* real ones – almost, *not quite*. The gap between real and not real, like a good copy is very small. In **Chapter Four**, the focus is not on the gap, but the likeness: on the fact that the copy is so good. In this chapter, then, there are two opposite responses to uncertainty. It’s not just about taking away aspects of the other which cannot be known, but about keeping things uncertain *in order to* allow this process to occur.

In **Chapter Five**, uncertainty is the central point upon which interpretations pivot in an attempt to find meaning, test authenticity and reality, knowledge and experience. But

the process of trying to make unknown into known, uncertain into certain, is interesting in itself for some, regardless of its ability to arrive at conclusions; and a few people revel in the unknown as that which is more enchanting than their idea of everyday life. For many there is a need to *accept* uncertainty: as described, this allows for things that cannot be known in the terms of rationalist materialism. Uncertainty becomes *intrinsic* to the haunting experience, which is thus allowed to *be*. This position also reinforces the imaginative space which allows some people to co-habit with more ease. But there is often tension between openness, an ability to ‘hold’ competing perspectives, and a desire to maintain one position over the other – at least in public.

The Hierarchy of the Senses

In **Chapter Three**, a majority of events are described as auditory. Sounds are deemed to be less certain or ‘distinct’ events than sightings. There are a few ‘flesh and blood’ sightings, but what is seen is also generally characterised as rather vague – shadows, fleeting movements, outlines, silhouettes, reflections. There is also a ‘sensing’ sight described by some: a form of intuitive ‘knowing’ in the mind’s eye. In **Chapter Four**, the vagueness of experience, as described, is utilised for offering imaginative leeway. Sightings are fundamentally to be avoided; they confer too much detail, afford less distance. In **Chapter Five**, sight seems to regain its historical ascendancy, its dominant cultural place, becoming central to the way people interpret uncanny events. The emphasis is on the rationalist ethos – ‘seeing is believing’. This is applied and tested, becoming a lynchpin in the search for proof. For some, seeing a ghost remains the holy grail of proof (especially those who know people who have seen the ghost but for whom this experience remains frustratingly elusive). But for many, it will never be enough to see a ghost. Even those more open to believing in ghosts at times doubt the ‘evidence of their senses’, are not sure if what they see is something objectively ‘out there’, separate to their perceiving selves; there is deep uncertainty about what accounts for authentic experience. Thus, encounters are contested at every level; sight loses its ascendancy as proof. Already, by **Chapter Four**, there is a desire to not quite believe that what one has seen isn’t not-quite there!

In **Chapter Three**, the ‘not-quite’, ‘as if’, ‘almost’, nature of events suggests, as described, a mere hair’s breadth between what is real and what is not. Despite this, and all the questioning of ‘reality’, at the level of description, most people are able to re-live what ‘happened’ in a surprisingly straight-forward manner. They generally succeed in conveying these experiences as distinct, often ‘sticking out’ because they can’t be accounted for, or are out of place. The strange is accepted as real, as an experience which impacts senses and feelings; the real as strange needs no imaginative effort to embellish it. In **Chapter Four**, the way uncanny events are often subdued as ordinary might suggest the limits of people’s imagination to think beyond normal categories. But there is also a desire for the ghost to *remain* unreal, to be *relegated* to the realm of the imaginary. As described, people seem to accept uncertainty, the elusive nature of the uncanny, because it allows them to suspend belief and disbelief simultaneously. Keeping the ghost suspended in an imaginary realm is a distancing strategy. But it’s not the same as making the ghost a *fiction*, like a character in a story or film. There is still room for the experience to be authentic on certain terms. This is illustrated by the fact that some women interviewed describe utilising the imaginative possibilities of their uncanny experiences *as* fictions, but seem to acknowledge a distinction. The ghosts lend themselves to imaginative narrative because they can never properly be made known, certain or real; but that doesn’t mean that they are not known, certain or real on their own terms. The relationship between fiction and ‘authentic’ reality is mediated by the question: can something that is of the imagination nonetheless have its own ‘reality’? In **Chapter Five**, depending on people’s motives and positions, evidence is employed to make uncanny events either authentic or unreal, even a hoax. It is at this point that arguments about what is ‘real’ and what is ‘unreal’ became contested, and gendered. Generally, again, it is the women who seem to allow imagination its own ‘reality’, whilst also distinguishing *between* imagination and reality: an acknowledgement of the liminality of what counts for the real.

In **Chapter Three**, events are described in relation to the moment of witness. These call into question participants' ability to sustain a sense of 'presence', but the moment is already replete with a myriad of materialities and memories, already framed by cultural ideas and stereotypes, pregnant with past representations. This thesis focuses on the experience of the senses – but also on *making sense*: intrinsic to the process of having a sensory experience is the act of trying to make sense, make meaning, interpret it even as one describes it to oneself, translates it in the act of witness. In this chapter, for example, events replicate folkloric belief in the liminal nature and place of ghosts. Other cultural conventions, outlined in the introductory chapter, are assumed: the haunted home is old, at least it should be; the ghosts are previous inhabitants (tied to place if not to people). Throughout the chapters there is an assumption that home contains private spaces where the self *should* be able to reside in peace.

In **Chapter Four**, this relationship between sensory and making sense, between presence and the present, is reinforced by the fact that people attempt to control experience through the interpretations they place on them: experience, as described, is filtered through the cultural tool kits people *bring* to it. The ghost has to obey gender, moral, and social conventions. Gender difference in particular is very clearly demarcated; narrative is confined by cultural norms. But the uncanny event always exceeds the representation, the narrative cannot always be so easily contained; and some people at times have to acknowledge a need to *adjust themselves* to the events, to control their responses to them rather than be able to control the events themselves. The emphasis of **Chapter Five** shifts to the ways in which people's interpretations of experience fall in line with expectations and prior beliefs. Adjustment again is required when experience exceeds beliefs; sometimes this leads to a contestation, a defending of position, where narrative tries to *mould* experience into known categories of knowledge; sometimes, experiences change belief. The haunted home itself is also 'constructed' by the local neighbourhood or previous inhabitants over time, through the legacy and circulation of certain stories, where expertise and authority are conferred to those with neighbourhood longevity and knowledge. In some case studies, the social mechanism of the origin of the idea of the home as haunted is very distinct. But not everyone agrees. The home's social 'identity' is complicated by different interpretations and perspectives within the same household, and some people resist the influence of others' experiences.

The haunted home might be co-constructed through shared narrative, but its identity can never be fixed because experiences are uneven and interpretations are contested.

Continuities

The thesis is also replete with continuities. In **Chapter Three**, people's sense of home seems relatively fixed through repeated domestic rituals and habits of movement moulded by responses to the physical fabric and by the memory of uncanny events over time. In **Chapter Four**, there are consistent responses to the apparent gender of the ghosts. There is also a continuing representation of domesticity as gendered. Home is a place where the drama of gender politics is still performed. It is not that home is a restrictive place. As Young (2005) and others have argued, home is often granted positive attributes, here despite or even because of being haunted. For K in CS2 – confined to home by illness – it is a comforting, healing place, despite the ghosts she fears. For some, the home or the ghosts within it liberate creativity. For others, there is a match between the home/ghost and a particular set of domestic ideals. It is less, then, that home itself is confining to women; more that social conventions within gender relations are revealed through people's different responses to uncanny events. In **Chapter Five** this process of repeated gender and social conventions continues and is maintained through social influences. The maintenance of dominant paradigms of knowledge, for example, tend to disparage women, who continue to be associated with emotion, feeling, intuition, folklore and alternative beliefs. In turn, as described, these beliefs seem to maintain themselves, despite the contestation and uncertainty. As this project shows, ghost experiences and stories continue to enliven and trouble 'ordinary' lives in many different home contexts, and other folk and religious rituals and beliefs are also present. Experiences of the supernatural are clearly not new, as historians such as Finucane (1996), Maxwell-Stuart (2006) and Davies (2007) have explored; their insights are outlined in the first chapter. Whilst some well-established cultural assumptions appear to be replicated in participant accounts, many others are not. In general terms, however, this thesis attests to the continuity of the haunted house as an idea, and the haunted home as a place where people live. There is a further, related continuity – of specific narratives over time. These at times seem to become 'fixed' through repetition; the ideas circulating through informal social interaction become relatively stable, despite contestations over them.

Implied by many of these themes is the liminal nature of the haunted home, a place in-between fixed and fluid, as well as a place both fixed *and* fluid. Events (or their assumed cause), are sometimes fixed into specific forms, into relatively bounded entities or beings; sometimes they remain or become mutable, permeable, hardly distinct at all. This project reinforces the ideas of Ellison (2001) and Bennett and Royle (1995) in seeing the uncanny as an *effect*, an experience. For this reason, it eludes rational grasp, but it is also an object of enquiry, as described, something which is shared and constructed in different ways. At times it disturbs categories of subject and object, at others reinforces them. Most often, it is both something out there and in here: the uncanny event is liminal in its very experience.

In **Chapter Three**, I described how the majority of uncanny events are experienced in the passing places, openings and ‘inbetween’ places, highlighting the liminal within the interior – places neither here nor there, unsettling and fixing boundaries. They reinforce the places within the home deemed more private and more public. Events are often specific to particular places – a corner of a room, the landing of a staircase. Some places in the home are defined by movement – staircases and doorways and corridors aren’t places to stay. The complexity and fluidity of domestic processes also vie with ideas of the ‘successful’ domestic interior as a place of order, where everything is in its place. In **Chapter Four**, boundaries are reinforced through strategies of distance, but there are also intimate events, haptic moments, personal meanings, a fascination to reach out across the divide. The home is differentiated by these different maps and markings, with boundaries also being emotional and psychological; the importance, for example, of the home’s atmosphere for some suggests that *feelings* demarcate and differentiate space as much as physical markers. In **Chapter Five**, there is a different form of boundary – between the known and unknown – which is also broken down by those wishing to maintain, or acknowledge, the openness of experience as something, as described, both real and unreal: experience as liminal – something that can’t quite arrive at its destination, floating between one account and another.

Participants’ descriptions of the home and its atmosphere suggest the home is also a *bounded* place with a particular physical presence. There is nothing indeterminate or uncertain about its externality. Home is demarcated by a fixed outer shell, an outline or

membrane, which contains multiplicity within. Being haunted reinforces the uniqueness and distinctiveness of home, whether a modern, mock-Tudor suburban house in an estate of look-alikes, or the oldest house in the village, standing large, proud, and full of historical 'character'. The home itself refuses to be placed or contained, subdued – or domesticated. This project indeed 'takes seriously' the home's 'own forces', between 'potential and determination': the material spaces of the home are sometimes described in terms of their own potential to 'be themselves' (Dewsbury et al., 2002: 439).

Holloway rightly argues that there is no 'single essence' of place: it is 'constructed in a myriad of ways' (Holloway, 1998: 11). For participants, their homes do have a singular essence, but this is both the sum of its many parts and somehow *more* than the sum. These parts are in dynamic relation, constantly being added to over time. People seek a 'fit' between the perceived reality and their own fantasy of home. This is a two-way process, a meeting between home and inhabitant. Home is not a passive recipient of change but needs to be respected and negotiated. The ghosts reinforce the liminal boundaries of home, but also at times the home's ability to reinforce its own original boundaries. In CS10, for example, B suggests that home's spaces cannot be contained – including the walls of his own flat within the house. This 'private' space affords him no real privacy or protection from the ghosts because, on a wider temporal scale, the walls become temporary, flimsy structures. Cresswell suggests that landscapes (and, by extension, homes) are 'never finished or complete, not easily framed or read' (Cresswell, 2003: 280). But here it is the home's imagined blueprint which dominates, challenging the potential for anything but superficial changes and claims. It is with and/or against such agency that participants shape their own subjectivity. B's role, his place in the house, his connection, allows him to fulfil an ideal of self. He doesn't merely 'imagine' into shape the house and his place in it; the house itself provides a challenging multi-agencied space – of which he is also an active part – to perform and create subjectivity. This challenge of the ghosts and the house sharpens his sense of self as much as shakes it.

The home's interior, then, emerges from the case studies as a charismatic, complex space of materialities and temporalities, bodies and agencies. Matter itself is given agency – a 'wayward expressiveness' (Kearnes, 2003: 139). A 'broader concept' of materiality, then – elusive, impossible to pinpoint – the uncanny event as both immaterial and material, sensual, coming from and going to where we cannot say; indeterminate, yet having effect. People, then, hold in tension a rather more inert idea of

the home as a private, secret place for authentic selves – of inhabitants, the space itself – to ‘be’ and ‘belong’; and home as this collection of shifting, jostling, agencies, bodies, and positions: a process in which the self is continuously challenged and also moulded. Perhaps the haunted home, in particular, is a form of ‘coalition’, as Wiley and Barnes (1996) suggest, at times more an antagonism or competition for space and ownership, at others something more synergistic, affirming, harmonious, where the multiplicity of agencies from past and present creates depth, even, as described, enhancing very particular ideals of home and self.

The home, then, is at heart a place where different claims to ownership or belonging are played out. Ghosts are rarely seen as traumatised or malevolent in these case studies. The focus is more on continuing attachment – to home, to family members within the home. If ghosts appear troubled, anxious, even a little disruptive, it is because they are believed to be concerned about their *material* space. Ghosts therefore reinforce the connection between people and places as something of too great an emotional significance to be bounded by linear ideas of time and space, or by narrowly human concerns. The effort participants put into reinforcing their place within home testifies to the importance they attach to it for a continuing sense of identity.

Miller (2001) rather dramatises the negative aspect of living in an already-lived-in house, but he is right to suggest the importance of history and memory in the way the act of being haunted is framed by inhabitants. He suggests that people need to come to terms with the ‘agency’ expressed in the temporality of the home and its material culture – to develop a ‘larger cosmology of authenticity, truth, negotiation and identity’ (ibid: 111). This is exactly what many participants speak of: they are already doing it. Part of this ‘larger cosmology’ includes an expanded notion of materiality, as discussed, but also an expanded sense of the continuing influence of the past on the present, not as something that is anachronistic, nor something that can be completely subdued, but as part of an idea of the past as intrinsic to the present in active ways. Transitions are negotiated as part of the accumulation of identities. The dynamic between change and continuity marks the process of being ‘present’ as a self-at-home.

As researchers, our focus shouldn’t be on the impossibility of finding ‘truth’ – or on the erroneousness of the belief that truth exists – but on the attempt to arrive at some – partial, multiple, contested – *truths* which allow the excess of experience not to

overwhelm the self-at-home but to place it in some normalising, often social, context. Ghost story narratives, as Gelder says, 'spill over their own boundaries' (Gelder, 1994: ix): there is a sense of an ongoing process. In some case studies, arguments over the 'truth' of an event continue many years after it is experienced. The idea of truth, or proof, is important as a touchstone of identity. It is why so much effort and argument goes into trying out different narratives, testing out and prioritising different methods to arrive at them, or the slippages and denials needed to maintain a desired effect. The process is shaped by wider cultural forces, ideas, conventions, dominating hierarchies, social stereotypes, and power dynamics.

Probyn and Fortier's idea of 'identity as transition' (Fortier, 2000: 2) also suggests that liminal *places* of transition – where ghosts are seen or felt – might provide metaphors of identity, appearing, as described, where people pass from one place to another, points of openings and closures. The subject is forced to encounter the 'intersubjective, performative, and contingent aspects' of its own 'formation' (Korf, 2008: 715) within a physical set of spaces. But people do 'contain' the excess of their experience in different ways. This is, perhaps, one framework to describe the 'temporary hold on the unique density and complexity of subjectivity' (Blackman et al., 2008: 7). People also exclude and assimilate their ghosts in different ways, sometimes simultaneously. It is this very process which reinforces subjectivity, through the constant negotiation of the home's and the self's different identities. The ghosts intensify, trouble, enhance this process. Humanists might perceive home as an 'anchoring point through which human beings are centred' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006: 11); so, in fact, do many participants. But home is always a place of 'almosts'. Just as uncanny events and the ghosts are often described in the language of 'not quites' and 'as ifs', so too does subjectivity always *almost* come into stable being. This drama is played out in particularly vivid ways within the haunted home, as the shifting matches and fits between home and self are lived, felt and imagined. Many participants manage to describe their experience as both real and unreal, fiction and fact – somewhere between the two. Narrative is suspended between these two positions. This isn't a failure of narrative. It reveals a sometimes unsettling truth: the liminal nature of identity, experience, place, and of narrative itself.

POSITIONINGS

The cross-cutting themes, described above, also suggest three connected sets of observations and questions which have relevance beyond this thesis. I will end this chapter, and the thesis, by outlining them.

Home

This project suggests the need to re-focus on experiences within the domestic interior as a physically situated site. Exploring the material spaces of particular homes allows for investigation of how identities are formed at a very local level, in the different ways people forge a sense of belonging. Ideas of home as fluid, multiple, imaginary, have provided an important and rich set of interventions; but such a move has tended to downplay the equal importance of home's physical rootedness. There is a need to focus on how places *become* fixed in the way they are identified and constructed, rather than assuming that the dynamic and fluid creation of identity through the intersection of wider social and geographical contexts is more important than the relative stability of ideas and identities over time. This, for me, is the striking thing, how places and identities manage to be fixed as much as they are – how they get to 'stick'. Such a focus need not essentialise place itself as innately 'fixed', but needs to allow particular demarcated places to be granted their own agency, force, charisma. These might *seem* to be the creation of people's own fantasies and imaginings of place, but this thesis suggests a more complex, two-way interaction between different forms of bodies, pressing upon each other, containing each other in different ways. Ahmed's (2000) 'strange encounters' must include those of places as much as other people.

As this project suggests, there is also an attendant need to scrutinise the 'everyday', 'familiar' or 'mundane' as concepts which are not always as they appear, not always experienced as they might be expected to. The haunted home might explore the uncanny aspect of domesticity in a rather direct way; but a spotlight on its processes suggests a need to extend such scrutiny into other contexts of the domestic interior, to explore how its micro-geographies, the inconsequential moments, help build different types of narrative which, in turn, form people's sense of belonging, ownership, and privacy. Work examining these persisting ideas and ideals could be extended to other contexts,

as could the way such spaces are ‘mapped’ in terms of geography, myth and emotion. For example, the relationship between belonging and ownership might be investigated for those, like caretakers, who are paid to live in places they don’t own; it is likely to be more complex than Miller (2001) suggests when he claims that people feel alienated from homes owned by others. That idea is certainly problematised by some of my case study participants.

Approaching the Ghost

This thesis has tested out an approach which moves robustly beyond a standard use of the ghost as fiction, metaphor or social figure. By doing so, I have been able to show the richness and complexity of people’s own experiences, have allowed the effect of the experience centre stage, have dwelt within the gaps between what can and cannot be said and what can and cannot be known, in order to investigate people’s relationship to knowledge, narrative, and experience themselves. Clearly there are metaphors and similes, some employed by me, some by participants. Ghosts come to represent aspects of self, social relations, or the ‘beyond’ of these categories. But ghosts aren’t just textual metaphors, nor ‘things’ to believe in or oppose. They are an intrinsic part of material geographies, experienced in and changing people’s perspectives of specific places.

The ‘middle ground’ challenge posed already by researchers of religion and belief is not always straightforward, but seems important and useful. It should be extended to allow for the examination of other, related, contexts. It doesn’t just naïvely accept uncanny ‘experience’ as authentic but traces, as described, how beliefs and ideas about knowledge, about authenticity, inform people’s lives and the way they respond to themselves and each other in certain places. It also allows for different types of embodied, material understandings of place – people’s intimate ‘knowledge’ of the material and sensory spaces of their homes – to be given their place in considering the way such experience is interpreted. A nuanced sense of experience emerges which is something both novel and already framed and represented in ways which inform it. Such insights are only available through such an approach.

Ideas about the supernatural are already contested and uncertain. Nonetheless, this approach would be useful in exploring different kinds of belief and their geographical

contexts. By going beyond a tendency for geographies of belief to focus on religion, I have shown the continuing importance in many people's lives of so-called 'alternative' beliefs, and how these intersect. The continuities of folklore rituals and narratives – often attached to particular places and objects – suggest an especial need to extend work in this area. Other sites of hauntings could also be scrutinised. The folklore of immigrants might provide insights into people's sense of belonging: do beliefs from the original homeland persist in the new context? This thesis also touched upon a continuity of certain beliefs and rituals around found objects in the home, which might also be explored further. It also points to the intriguing interplay between long-standing folkloric beliefs and rituals, popular forms of belief, and people's 'actual' experiences. The 'haunted home' itself is both a cultural icon and a set of uncanny, sensual events; the one representation troubles the other's effect, and vice versa. There are many potential contexts in which research into such a complex relationship might be extended.

New Humanism

Throughout the process of this project, I have been fascinated by attempts to reformulate subjectivity in the light of recent theoretical developments which emphasise its contingency or even lack. How can we still speak of 'subjects' – or allow subjects to speak – without being accused of replicating a naïve individualism? On the surface, this project could be viewed as a defence of the old position, of humanistic enquiry, methods and theoretical assumptions. By interviewing people and listening to their experiences and the way they interpret them, I have been interested to discover how they themselves maintain an idea of self in relation to place – how the place of home informs ideas of self, how self has to 'stand up to' home. I allow room to explore the different ways people's perceptions of the contextual experiences that make up their domestic lives are influenced by other people, other places, wider cultural beliefs. But I also have looked out for ways in which people themselves seem to be aware of what influences them, suggesting a level of control or resistance possible through such understanding – including sometimes the *desire* to be influenced in particular ways. I also allow space for the push as well as pull of the world, the less easy to represent emerging 'forces' of the home, its 'fields of intensity', its excessive materialities, atmospheres, its agency and character, and that of its ghosts and presences. The focus

shifts to a wider sense of interactions and relationships which inform experience, something which is indeed in process, but which needs to be routed through particular *social* relations. People's sense of their own subjectivity emerges through such a movement of pasts and potentials, sensory impacts and after-event narratives: it is part of this process and therefore also a work in progress. The subject-object binary might be reinforced, but it is done so through an understanding of the complexity and fluidity of the binary relationship, including the ways in which witnesses doubt their own witness; and the ways they struggle at times to maintain a sense of separateness, singularity and privacy. By attending to what they tell us, we can watch for the 'gaps' and shifts in their stories, how these are informed by beliefs about public and private places and selves. This thesis, then, suggests the need to allow people to show us how they grapple with ways of making sense of their experience, and what's at stake for them in doing so. It is itself, of course, another attempt at organising experience, its own creative endeavour.

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CASE STUDY KEY

CS1: Rural North Wales. Old detached house. Married couple, **RM** and husband **D**, and son **JP**. Religious words and images, ghost monk

CS2: Inner city East London. Victorian maisonette. Three female friends; **P**, **K** and **Ch**. A family of ghosts on the landing of the staircase

CS3: Ipswich suburb. 30s semi. Female half of engaged couple, **S**. The ghosts are previous owners, an elderly couple

CS4: Wiltshire cottage. Rural hamlet. Female owner, **R**, living alone; her mother also stays. The ghost, 'Annie', a previous owner, moves pictures on the walls

CS5: Wirral village. Detached old house. Married couple, **M** and husband **L**, and visiting daughter **G**. A ghost, 'The Pink Lady', shadows and smells

CS6: North West London suburb. 30s detached villa. Female Romanian employee, **T**, and visiting daughter **O**. Paid to sleep in a haunted room

CS7: Bristol suburb. Victorian semi. Male half of couple, **M**. Sporadic events; footsteps, singing, cries, crashes

CS8: Inner-city Liverpool. Council house. Female divorcee **D** and son **F**. The grandmother's ghost, door handles moving, footsteps, a baby's cry

CS9: Blackpool suburb. Modern detached house. Female half of married couple **V**, older daughter **A**, younger daughter **G**, friend **J**. Haunted by family members

CS10: North West London. Arts centre (an old house) in a park. Caretaker, **B**. Many ghosts, and a pivotal event – a rescue from a 'demon'

CS11: Greater Manchester. Old cottage in rural hamlet. Married couple, **H** and husband **A**. Male and female ghosts in the past, a pivotal event recalled

CS12: North West London. Rented Victorian flat. Single female **A**, and the ghost of her cat, **W**

CS13: Cornwall village. Old castle. Elderly female, **A**, her son, and her son's girlfriend, **S**. Numerous reported ghosts